

Hebrews 4:1-5 “Getting Serious about Entering God’s Rest” [**](#)

Main Idea: Hebrews 4:1-5 says it’s vital that we get serious about the subject of entering God’s rest. We learn three things about God’s rest from it.

I. Consider the exhortation concerning God’s rest (1).

A. You can enter God’s rest.

1. There was rest in Canaan .
2. There will be rest in heaven.
3. There is rest in Christ.

B. You can miss God’s rest.

1. We ought to be concerned for ourselves.
2. We ought to be concerned for others.

II. Consider the entrance into God’s rest (2).

A. It requires the gospel.

B. It requires faith.

1. Faith is believing what God did and said.
2. Faith is trusting in what God did and said.
3. Faith is submitting your life to God.

III. Consider the explanation of God’s rest (3-5).

A. To understand God’s rest we must go back to creation.

1. If you want to find something you lost, you must go back to where you lost it.
2. We lost God’s rest in the garden of Eden.

B. To appreciate God’s rest we must grasp what God did (3-4).

1. God finished His work (3).
2. God rested from His work (4).

C. To experience God’s rest we must obey what God says (5).

1. He is the source of rest.
2. He determines who will enter His rest.
3. He says that He gives His rest to those who rest in Him.

Make It Personal: Since the promise of entering God’s rest still stands...

1. It matters what you do today.

2. It's vital that you prepare for the future.

Suppose a vaccine was released and the public was told it would provide protection against a deadly disease that had killed millions. And suppose that subsequently billions of people worldwide took the vaccine and sang its praises. But later it was discovered by scientists that the vaccine did *not* work as touted, that it did *not* prevent the disease but merely masked its symptoms for a short while, and that consequently those who took the vaccine were *not* safe. Here's the question. Should the public be told? Should people hear the truth about the vaccine that was supposedly saving their lives? Most, my hunch is, would agree that the public *should* hear the truth about the deficiencies of the highly touted vaccine.

Now answer this. Should people who have a deficient faith be told? The fact is, there is an epidemic that is taking lives worldwide. One out of every one person born dies of it. It's called the "sin-virus." The wages of sin is death.

But all over the world "faith vaccines" are being touted as the solution. Here's one of the most popular: "Believe in God. Live a good life, be nice to your neighbor, make sure the good in your life outweighs the bad in your life and when you die, you will enjoy life eternal in the presence of your loving God."

I think of funeral services I've been to where the minister declared, in essence, "Your loved one lived a good life, and so you can be sure that he's at rest now." But is he? On what basis is the minister proclaiming this assurance? The "faith vaccine" he preached is a vaccine of good works. He says his certainty is based on the goodness of the person who died.

Our society says that a person's "faith" is a personal thing. As long as a person believes *something*, and as long as that something makes them feel good about themselves and their journey, no one should question it.

I don't buy that, and I don't believe you do either. We know that just *believing* something doesn't make it true. Just believing a vaccine will cure a deadly disease isn't enough. If the vaccine is legitimate, then it should be tested and it will pass the test.

That's why, last week, I encouraged you to take the "faith test." We discussed several types of *deficient* faith, non-saving faith. What makes them deficient is not a lack of sincerity, for people truly believe they're going to heaven. The problem is that the *object* of their faith is deficient. "I'm going to heaven because...I prayed a prayer" or "I got baptized" or "I've lived a good life" and so on.

Then, by looking at Hebrews 3:14-15, we learned that real faith, saving faith, is characterized by three traits. Real faith: 1) Shares in Christ, 2) Perseveres to the end, and 3) Is a present tense reality.

Although the Bible says that a person is saved *by faith* (Eph. 2:8), in reality faith doesn't save us. Jesus Christ saves us. Let me say that again. Faith doesn't save a person from the sin-virus. Jesus Christ alone does that. Faith, which is a God given gift, merely plugs us into Christ who is the Savior and who saves a person from the sin-virus on the basis of His sinless life, His vicarious death, and His triumphant resurrection.

So we ought to examine our faith, and regularly. That means we ought frequently to examine the *object* of our faith. That is to say, we ought to answer this question, "On what basis do I think that I'm ready to stand before God?" Is the basis of my hope related to something I have done, or that I am doing, or that I plan to do? Or perhaps the basis of my hope are my connections—I come from a good family, or I belong to a good church. These, according to God's Word whose assessment alone matters, are deficient foundations of faith. There is only one legitimate foundation of faith, says God in His Word, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)."

Which brings us to the subject of *God's rest*. The reason we need to get serious about our faith is because God's rest is at stake. That's the point the author of Hebrews makes as he transitions from chapter 3 to chapter 4. Hebrews 4:1 states, "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."

Most of us don't think about the future very much. I'm not talking about where we're going for vacation next summer, or where we're going to live in the next phase of life when we retire, for we think about those future matters. I'm talking about where we're going after we leave this life, where we'll spend eternity.

You say, "Can a person really know?" The writer of Hebrews says we can. He says the *promise*¹¹ (the sure guarantee) of *entering* (experiencing, participating in) *God's rest* (the gift God extends to undeserving sinners like us) *still stands* (the invitation remains).

My friends, we ought to think about the future, specifically God's *rest*, more than we do. In fact, Hebrews 4:1-5 says it's vital that we get serious about the subject of entering God's rest. What does that mean practically speaking? What is God's rest, and how does one enter it? We'll find the answers to these and other related questions this morning.

I. Consider the exhortation concerning God's rest (1).

Verse 1 is actually a command, a charge given by the writer to his original audience and to us. Remember, originally these words were given to a group of Jews who had professed faith in Jesus the Messiah, but were having second thoughts. Due to persecution they were considering reneging on their commitment to Christ and going back to their old beliefs and ways. In the first three chapters the writer has encouraged them to persevere by showing the superiority of Christ—He's superior to the angels (ch 1 & 2) and superior to Moses (ch 3). And now he offers this exhortation in 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." A more literal translation would read, "Let us fear," and puts that charge at the beginning of the sentence rather than in the middle.

You say, "I thought *fear* was a bad thing." No, not all fear. The fear of man is bad, but we should fear some things and here's one of them. *Let us fear lest we fall short of and miss God's rest.* As far as God's rest goes, there are two and only two options...

A. You can enter God's rest. The promise still stands. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." So Jesus offered people *rest*, and the writer of Hebrews says the promise of entering God's rest still stands.

I'm afraid that one of the reasons we don't think enough about the subject of God's rest is because of some wrong notions. We hear the word "rest" and we think "inactivity." Ask a five year old child if he wants to take a nap on a beautiful summer afternoon. But "rest" is a good thing, you tell him. But he's not buying it! Similarly, ask an adult if he's ready to go float on some cloud and strum a harp for 10,000 years, and he's likely to tell you he'd rather watch his NFL football game.

Hebrews 4 can help us. The word "rest" appears eleven times (either as a noun or verb) in verses 1-11. It's based on the verb "to cease" (*pauomai*) and literally means "to cease down" or "to thoroughly cease" (*katapausis*).¹² In this passage "rest" is used in three different, yet related senses.

1. *There was rest in Canaan* . Verse 3—"They shall never enter my rest." That's a quotation of Psalm 95:11, and 'they' refers to the Israelites in Moses' day. There God is saying that because of their sin, every Hebrew over the age of twenty forfeited the privilege to enter the promised land of Canaan . So there is Canaan rest.

2. *There will be rest in heaven*. That's what the writer of Hebrews is talking about, at least in part, in verse 1, "the promise of entering his rest." I say 'heaven' but the hope God extends to His people is actually "the new heaven and earth," as Peter announced in 2 Peter 3:13, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

The apostle John describes the new heaven and earth in the final two chapters of the Bible, beginning with this admission in Revelation 21:1-2, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

That’s the hope God offers His people today, the hope of entering and living with Him in a new heaven and earth, of enjoying there His eternal rest. So there was rest in Canaan (past tense), and there will be rest in heaven (future tense), but thirdly...

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

These “rests” are related and sometimes overlap in the text. That’s because God’s rest is not simply a place but more like a quality of existence. That helps explain why we can experience it now (in part) and will experience it fully when we are with the Lord.

Which raises the question, “What will life be like *after* this life?” There are a host of popular images. Some talk about “crossing the river,” and others “going to the happy hunting grounds in the sky.” A recent movie talks about “kicking the bucket.” The Bible actually offers some helpful words and images, like celestial city (Rev. 21-22), paradise (2 Cor 12:4), and a beautiful house/mansion (John 14:1-4). The book of Hebrews talks about our future hope as entering a heavenly country (11:16) and a heavenly Jerusalem (12:22).

In a helpful little booklet, *Heaven: Biblical Answers to Common Questions*, Randy Alcorn offers us some valuable assistance in understanding what the Bible teaches about heaven. For starters, he points out that heaven will not be our final home. “What we usually think of when we hear the word *Heaven* is what theologians call the *intermediate* Heaven. For Christians, it’s where we go when we die. It’s the place we’ll live until our bodily resurrection. Our Christian loved ones who’ve died are now in this present, intermediate Heaven... The Heaven we go to when we die is a place without suffering, but it is not the place where we’ll live forever. Our eternal home, where God will come down to dwell among his people, is called the New Earth.”^[3]

Later Alcorn elaborates, “In the intermediate Heaven, we’ll be with Christ, and we’ll be joyful, but it won’t be our permanent home. We’ll be looking forward to our bodily resurrection and relocation to the New Earth. (Our loved ones won’t go to the New Earth before we get there. We’ll go together to colonize the New Earth.)”^[4]

If you want an idea of what’s coming, think of what we lost in the Garden of Eden. The paradise lost in Eden foreshadows the paradise restored in the coming New Earth. I love Alcorn’s answer to the question, “What won’t be in Heaven?” He writes:

No death, no suffering. No funeral homes, abortion clinics, or psychiatric wards. No rape, missing children, or drug rehabilitation centers. No bigotry, no muggings or killings. No worry or depression or economic downturns. No wars, no unemployment. No anguish over failure and miscommunication. No con men. No locks. No death. No mourning. No pain. No boredom.

No arthritis, no handicaps, no cancer, no taxes, no bills, no computer crashes, no weeds, no bombs, no drunkenness, no traffic jams and accidents, no septic-tank backups. No mental illness. No unwanted e-mails.

Close friendships but no cliques, laughter but no put-downs. Intimacy, but no temptation to immorality. No hidden agendas, no backroom deals, no betrayals.

Imagine mealtimes full of stories, laughter, and joy, without fear of insensitivity, inappropriate behavior, anger, gossip, lust, jealousy, hurt feelings, or anything that eclipses joy. That will be Heaven.^[5]

Talk about something to look forward to! That's what God's rest will be like, only better, for eye has not seen, nor ear heard the things that God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). Yet not everyone will experience that because there are two options. The first is that you can enter God's rest, but there's a second.

B. You can miss God's rest. To use the language of Hebrews 4:1, a person can "fall short" of entering God's rest. The Bible does not teach universalism, that everyone will experience God's rest. That's why the exhortation, "Let us fear." Simply put...

1. We ought to be concerned for ourselves. The promise of entering God's rest stands now, but the implication of that statement is that there is coming a time when it *won't*. "Today is the day of salvation," says the Bible.

Let the admonition sink in. "Let us be careful." "Let us fear." Philip Hughes offers this needed warning, "There is no attitude more dangerous to the church than that of unconcern and complacency."^[6]

Oh beloved, beware of unconcern and complacency when it comes to your soul! Some of us give great a deal of thought to planning for our retirement—will I have enough to live on, will I be a burden to my family, etc—but when it comes to planning for eternity, there's unconcern and complacency.

Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew (Gen. 25:34). Talk about living for the moment! He came home one day famished from being in the open country, smelled some good cooking, and said, "I want that now!" And he sold his birthright, his inheritance rights as firstborn, to get it.

As sad as that was, the fact is Esau lives today. He's sitting in church right now thinking about his noon meal rather than the eternal destiny of his soul. Be concerned for your soul, my friend!

But it's not just *our* soul that should matter to us. Verse 1 says to be careful that "none of you be found to have fallen short of it." That means...

2. We ought to be concerned for others. Are there any in our number who are in danger of missing God's rest because they're not trusting in Christ? Do you know your fellow church members well enough to know what they're really trusting in to get them to heaven? What about your family members? Your neighbors? Your friends at school? I love the way Charles Spurgeon put it. He was so burdened for the souls of men that he said they would have to jump over him, with his arms wrapped around their legs, to plunge into destruction.

This exhortation is urgent, my friend, because there are only two options. You can enter God's rest, or you can miss God's rest. That brings us to point two...

II. Consider the entrance into God's rest (2).

How does a person enter God's rest? Verse 2 tells us, "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."

Entering God's rest requires two things...

A. It requires the gospel. "We have had the gospel preached to us," says the writer. Actually, the noun "gospel" isn't in the sentence. It's a participle and literally reads, "We are evangelized people."^[7] We are people who have had the good news preached to us, the gospel message.

By the way, did you realize that the gospel was preached in the Old Testament? That's what verse 2 says, "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did." *They* is referring to the Jews in Moses' day. *They* heard the gospel, says Hebrews.

“How can that be?” you ask. “Christ wasn’t even born yet.” Here’s how. Old Testament preachers, like Moses, told listeners to *look ahead* and believe in the coming Messiah. A New Testament preacher says the same thing, only he tells his audience to *look back* and embrace the Messiah who has come.

Entering God’s rest requires the gospel. A person must hear the good news about the person and work of Jesus the Christ. But there’s a second essential...

B. It requires faith. As Robert Gromacki explains, “A saved person is always an evangelized person, but every evangelized person is not necessarily saved.”^[8] That was the problem of the Jews in Moses’ day, verse 2 concludes, for “the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”

At Kadesh Barnea the Jews heard the “good news” from Joshua and Caleb, that God was giving His people the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. But the good news did the people little good. Why not? Because they didn’t believe it. They didn’t believe God. They lacked *faith*.

To put it another way, when the people heard the testimony of Joshua and Caleb they treated that testimony, not as the word of God (which it was sense those men were merely relaying God’s promise to the people) but as the word of men, mere opinions.

In verse 2 we see the first use of the Greek noun “faith” (*pistis*) in Hebrews, a term we’ll see thirty-one more times in the book (only Romans uses it more, forty times). What is faith? Allow me to give you a working definition...

1. *Faith is believing what God did and said.* But believing is not merely intellectual, for...

2. *Faith is trusting in what God did and said.* It’s kind of like when you get sick and go to your doctor, and he says, “You’re sick and you need this medicine to get well.” And then he proceeds to write you a prescription. If you have faith in your doctor, you will believe what he said and act on what he did. You will do something with that prescription, and in so doing you will demonstrate that you trust in your doctor. But faith in God involves another vital component...

3. *Faith is submitting your life to God.* In chapter eleven we’ll see nearly two dozen examples of men and women who did just that. By faith they submitted their lives to God, no matter what the cost, not simply because they believed in what God did and said, and not simply because they trusted in what God did and said, but also because they truly submitted their lives to God. He was real to them, as He will be in the life of any person who exercises genuine faith. Hebrews 11:6 sums it up, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

We’ve pondered the *exhortation* concerning God’s rest (“be careful lest you fall short of it”). We’ve also seen that *entrance* into God’s rest requires the gospel and faith, that is, responding to the good news of Jesus Christ by believing, trusting, and submitting our lives to Him. That brings us to the third point...

III. Consider the explanation of God’s rest (3-5).

Notice verse 3, “Now we who have believed enter that rest.” Don’t miss the simplicity of it. To enter God’s rest, a person must believe. That was true for the Israelites. They could have entered Canaan rest, but they didn’t believe. That’s true for us, too, says the writer, “We who have believed enter that rest.”

Some passages tell us that *believing* is a present tense responsibility, like John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” There “believes” is present tense, whoever *is believing* in Jesus receives eternal life, is the sense.

Yet Hebrews 4:3 says, “We who have believed.” The verb is aorist (past) tense. That’s because *believing* begins at a point in some. The Bible calls a person a *believer* because at some point in his life, by God’s gracious working in

his heart, he stopped being an *unbeliever* and *believed* in Christ. And he made his belief public by being baptized. At that moment in his life, while standing in the waters of baptism, he gave public testimony to God's work of grace in his life and professed his faith—he *believed* in Christ. And the nature of true, Holy Spirit-generated, saving faith is that he continues to believe in the present, and *will believe* until the end.

To make the point clear the writer quotes again from Psalm 95:11 (as he did back in verse 11), in verse 3, “Just as God has said, ‘So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” We learn here how to help people who struggle with doubts. The writer quotes Scripture over and over in this book.

Now watch what he says at the end of verse 3, “And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world.” What does that teach us about God's rest? It's so basic you might miss it, namely...

A. To understand God's rest we must go back to creation. That's what the writer is doing with us here. He's reminding us of the creation account. Why would he do that? For one very simple reason...

1. *If you want to find something you lost, you must go back to where you lost it.*

Let me illustrate. When preparing this message, I was sitting in my office at the church typing away at the keyboard. I remembered a quote I'd read before, and wanted to use it. But I couldn't find it. In fact I couldn't even remember where I read that quote. Was it in a book, a magazine, online? I couldn't remember. So I started looking. I looked on my desk, on the shelf, even in the trash can (I was desperate!). But I couldn't find it, and then it dawned on me why. I'd read that quote in a journal that was located, not in my office at church, but *at my house*. I could have spent days looking for that quote in my office, and never would have found it because that's not where I lost it.

What does that have to do with God's rest? Plenty. Lots of people are looking for rest in all the wrong places. Some are looking for it in a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend. For others it's a career, or recreation. For still others, it's a bottle or a pill. But they'll never find it there because they didn't lost it there.

2. *We lost God's rest in the garden of Eden.* That's where the first man, Adam, sinned, and that's where mankind lost God's rest. If you want to regain it, you need to follow the writer of Hebrews back to creation.

Look again at the end of verse 3 and into verse 4, “And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’”

B. To appreciate God's rest we must grasp what God did (3-4). And specifically, what He did *at creation*. Two things are mentioned here...

1. *God finished His work (3).* He worked for six days fashioning the universe, then finished His work. So consequently...

2. *God rested from His work (4).* Remember, the writer has a very specific reason for wanting us to think about what God did at creation. God worked. God finished His work. God rested. The point is that God's rest has been available since God completed His creation. Rest was part of God's plan for mankind.

If you look at the creation account in Genesis 1-2, you'll notice that the statement “And there was evening and morning” appears in connection with each of the first six days of creation. But it's not there in connection with the seventh day. There we're simply told that God rested from His work.

To say that God “rested,” of course, doesn't mean that God shifted into inactivity, for as Jesus made clear in John 5:17, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” It simply means that God rested from doing *creation work*.

Leon Morris explains, “The completion of creation marks the end of a magnificent whole. There was nothing to add to what God had done, and he entered a rest from creating, a rest marked by the knowledge that everything that he

had made was very good (Gen 1:31). So we should think of the rest as something like the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment, from the completion of a task, from the exercise of creativity.”^[9]

Ponder again those words, *the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment*. That’s what *rest* is. Think of a job you’ve completed, and the feeling it produced afterward. Maybe you built your own house. You worked, and when you were done you *rested* from that work. You didn’t just stop working. You experienced *the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment*. That’s what rest is. That’s what God’s rest is, too.

Ponder the words Jesus announced just before He died on the cross: “It is finished (John 19:30).” He said those words because He had completed the work He’d come to do, the work of redemption. By living a perfect life and paying sin’s penalty through His death, He accomplished His mission. He provided salvation for His people. Then He entered into *the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment*. He *rested* from His work.

The question of the hour is this. *Are you resting in His finished work?* The world is full of people who are not. They are trying to work their way to heaven. They’re trusting in their own meritorious efforts to reach God. And there is no rest for them, for there’s always more to be done.

To understand God’s rest we must go back to creation because that’s where we lost it. To appreciate God’s rest we must grasp what He did—He worked, then rested. That’s what He did at creation, and that’s what He did in redemption, too. Which leads to this...

C. To experience God’s rest we must obey what God says (5). “And again in the passage above he says, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” That’s the third time on this page in my Bible that the writer has quoted that simple statement (in 3:11, then in 4:3, and here in 4:5), so it must be important! *They shall never enter my rest*. In those few words God teaches us three critical lessons about His rest.

1. *He is the source of rest.* “Rest” is something that God gives. It’s “my” rest, He says. It comes from Him alone.

2. *He determines who will enter His rest.* Here He says that some people will *never* enter my rest. Why not? Because those people wouldn’t believe Him, wouldn’t trust in Him, wouldn’t submit their lives to Him. No faith, no rest. On the other hand...

3. *He says that He gives His rest to those who rest in Him.* Verse 6—“It still remains that some will enter that rest.” What people? Who enters God’s rest? Verse 10—“Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work.”

If you’re not familiar with the story of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, it would be worth your while to get familiar with it, for John Bunyan in that classic book gives us a very helpful picture of the Christian life. It’s about a man who had a huge burden on his shoulders. To get rid of that burden the man looked at the cross, and his burden rolled away. Perhaps that’s what you need to do today. But that’s not the end of the story. “Christian,” as Bunyan calls his main character, is a pilgrim on a journey—that’s why it’s called *Pilgrim’s Progress*. He’s heading to the heavenly city. On the road he meets all sorts of distractions and dangers, and when he lets his guard down he gets in serious trouble, but when he walks by faith he moves ahead. At times he wonders if he’s going to make it, but enabled by God’s merciful provisions he presses on. And in the end he arrives in his eternal home, the heavenly city, the place of God’s rest.

Make It Personal: Since the promise of entering God’s rest still stands...

1. *It matters what you do today.* Believe in Christ. Trust in Him. Yield your life to Him. Enter into His rest. There’s more to learn about this rest, as we’ll see next time, the Lord willing. But since *next* week may never come, I finish with this charge.

2. *It’s vital that you prepare for the future.* Not tomorrow, but today. Prepare *today*.

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] The writer of Hebrews uses this word “promise” (Greek *epangelia*) fourteen times, more than any other New Testament book.

[2] R. Gromacki, p. 70.

[3] Randy Alcorn, pp. 8-9.

[4] Randy Alcorn, p. 10.

[5] Randy Alcorn, pp. 35-6.

[6] Philip Hughes, p. 155.

[7] The Greek term is *euaggelismenoi*.

[8] Gromacki, p. 71.

[9] Leon Morris, p. 41.