

Hebrews 4:6-11 “Getting Serious about Entering God’s Rest”—part 2 [\\*\\*](#)

Main Idea: In Hebrews 4:6-11 we learn two vital implications concerning God’s rest.

Some working definitions to keep in mind...

-*Faith* is believing what God did and said, trusting in what God did and said, and submitting one’s life to Him.

-*Rest* is the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment.

I. Implication #1: The promise of God’s rest remains (6-8).

A. Some will enter it (6a).

B. Some missed it (6b-7).

1. The Jews in the wilderness heard the good news.
2. The Jews in the wilderness refused to obey it.

C. Some experienced a taste of it (8).

1. Joshua gave God’s people Canaan-rest.
2. God said there was something better coming.

II. Implication #2: The experience of God’s rest involves responsibility (9-11).

A. To enter God’s rest you must believe that it exists (9).

1. It’s available because of what God did.
2. It’s available for the people of God.

B. To enter God’s rest you must *rest* (10).

1. You cannot work your way to God.
2. You must enter into the satisfaction of His accomplishment.

C. To enter God’s rest you must exhibit grace-enabled obedience (11).

1. Our obedience requires effort.
2. Our obedience is the fruit of His rest.

Take Inventory: Ponder the following...

1. If you really believe in Jesus you will experience His rest.
2. If you are resting in Jesus you will stop searching for something else.
3. If you are experiencing God’s rest, you won’t want to keep it to yourself.

God’s rest is available. That’s an amazing reality, yet sadly many, even professing Christians, are missing it and

for various reasons. Some don't know what it is, while others seek to obtain it in unfounded ways.

I'm convinced that one of the great barriers to experiencing God's rest is a *feeling*-based, rather than a *faith*-based approach to God. It's not a new problem either.

Ichabod Spencer pastored in Brooklyn, New York, from 1832-1854. While committed to the doctrines of grace, Spencer led many to Christ under his ministry, often as a result of his home visits. He made it his practice to visit each member of the church every year, and did so for 22 years. These visits weren't for social purposes, but spiritual ones. As a doctor of the soul, he went to talk with people about the condition of their *soul*. He also took time to write down what was said in these conversations, and his notes were later published in a very helpful two volume book entitled, *A Pastor's Sketches: Conversations with Anxious Souls Concerning the Way of Salvation*.

I'd like to reflect on one of his visits. A young woman from his church came and asked him if he would visit her sister who "was in a very anxious state of mind." When Spencer learned that the woman attended another church, he declined because he didn't want to appear to be stealing sheep. But the sister's plea was so urgent, he finally consented. In his own words here's what happened:

She lived in a neighborhood some miles distant...I immediately rode to her house. She entered the room where I was, and her sister, after introducing her to me, left us alone, that she might speak freely to me. I perceived that she was very much agitated, trembling and sighing. I said to her, "You seem to be very much troubled. What is it that distresses you?"

She said, "I have been converted three times, and I feel as if I needed it again!"

"Take care," said I, "that you do not get converted again *in the same way*. All that has done you no good. Has it?"

"No," said she; "not at all!"

"Then, do not get converted *so* again. You want a religion that shall last,—a religion to die with; and I advise you to get an entirely new kind."

I conversed with her for some time, aiming to teach her the nature of religion, and to quell the excitement of her mind, which appeared to be to arise more from an agitation of her sensibilities than from real conviction of sin. Her affections, more than her understanding and conscience, were excited. I visited her afterwards; and for some time her impressions appeared to me to become more scriptural and deep, and to promise a good result. But she was drawn away again among her old associates, at an exciting assemblage in the evening, where she professed to have become converted again. She was as joyful and happy as she had been before, and her religion lasted this time about six months.

The heart that has once been drunk with fanaticism, is ever afterwards exposed to the same evil. It will mistake excitement—any fancy, for true religion. Fanaticism is not faith.

When the affections, or mere sensibilities of the heart are excited, and the understanding and conscience are but little employed, there is a sad preparation for false hope—for some wild delusion or fanatical faith. The judgment and conscience should take the lead of the affections; but when the affections take the lead, they will be very apt to monopolize the whole soul, —judgment and conscience will be overpowered, or flung into the background; and then, the deluded mortal will have a religion of *mere impressions*—than faith—more fancy and fanaticism than holiness. Emotions, agitations, or sensibilities of any sort, which do not arise from clear and conscientious perception of truth, will be likely to be pernicious. The most clear perception of truth, the deepest conviction, is seldom accompanied by any great excitement of the sensibilities. Under such conviction, feeling may be deep and strong, but will not be fitful, capricious, and blind. To a religion of *mere impressions* one may be "converted three times," or three times more; to a religion of truth, one

conversion will suffice. In my opinion, my young friend was all along misled by the idea that religion consisted very much in a wave of feeling. Her instructors ought to have taught her better.<sup>[2]</sup>

I'll say it again. One of the great barriers to experiencing God's rest is a *feeling*-based, rather than a *faith*-based approach to God. Many lack assurance because they're trusting in their feelings. Worse yet, many have a false assurance because they're trusting in their feelings. What exactly is a faith-based approach to God, and what does it have to do with God's rest? We'll find the answer in Hebrews 4. Hebrews 4, like a powerful spotlight, can help us find our way through the fog of confusion.

Last week, in part one of "*Getting Serious about Entering God's Rest*," we looked at Hebrews 4:1-5. We pondered the *exhortation* concerning God's rest in verse 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." Then we considered the *entrance* into God's rest in verse 2, and learned that it requires two essentials: the gospel and faith. In verses 3-5 we looked carefully at the *explanation* of God's rest, and found out that to understand God's rest we must grasp what God did, namely, He worked, then He rested, then offered mankind the fruit of His rest. He did that at *creation*—He worked six days, then rested on the seventh day, then offered mankind the fruit of His rest. He followed the same pattern in *redemption*—God the Son completed the work His Father assigned Him by dying for sinners on the cross, then rested from His work, and now offers mankind the fruit of His rest.

In Hebrews 4:6-11, the text before us this morning, we move from explanation to implications. Specifically, we'll learn two vital implications concerning God's rest. It will be helpful to recall a couple of working definitions from last week...

*Some working definitions to keep in mind...*

**-Faith** is believing what God did and said, trusting in what God did and said, and submitting one's life to Him. Please note that faith is not based on feelings, but on the unchanging truth of who God is, what God did, and what God said. And those who exhibit saving faith experience God's rest. What is rest?

**-Rest** is the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment. I borrowed that phrase from commentator Leon Morris. We'll return to it momentarily.

## I. Implication #1: The promise of God's rest remains (6-8).

When studying the Bible it's important to notice repetition. Notice how the writer repeats the word "remains." Verse 6—"It still remains that some will enter that rest..." And verse 9—"There remains then a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." The writer wants his readers to know that the promise of God's rest remains. The door is open. The invitation stands.

He's emphasizing this, as we've pointed out several times, because some of his dear friends were pondering turning away from Christ and going back to their old ways in Judaism. For over three chapters now, he's been showing them the supremacy of Christ. And now he's pointing out the connection between Christ and God's rest.

The writer knows his history, and once again he's going to use Jewish history to teach about God's rest, namely that the promise of God's rest remains. He talks about three groups of people and their relationship to God's rest in verses 6-8.

**A. Some will enter it (6a).** "Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein," says the KJV. See God's astounding grace here. Some, not all, yet some undeserving sinners will enter His rest.

**B. Some missed it (6b-7).** Beginning in the middle of verse 6, "...and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience." Who's he talking about? He's referring again to the Jews in Moses' day around 1440 B.C. and points out two things that they did.

1. *The Jews in the wilderness heard the good news.* They "had the gospel preached to them," says verse 6. The word "gospel" simply means "good news." Here's it's a participle (we saw the same word earlier in verse 2) and literally means they were "the evangelized ones." That's because God had told them this incredibly good news, "I'm giving you the promised land. Just believe Me, trust Me, follow Me, and Canaan-rest will be yours."

But they "did not go in," says verse 6. Instead, although they *heard* the good news...

2. *The Jews in the wilderness refused to obey it.* They missed God's rest "because of their disobedience." It happened at Kadesh Barnea. The spies returned from their surveillance trip, and two said, "The land is flowing with milk and honey. Let's take it!" But the other ten spies moaned, "No, we can't! There are giants there!" And so instead of believing God, the people disobeyed God. And consequently, as a result of a *feeling*-based rather a *faith*-based approach to life, that entire generation died wandering in the wilderness and missed God's rest.

They missed it. Did that mean that God shut the door for good on His offer of rest? No. He once again demonstrated His mercy, as verse 7 explains, "Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'"

That second generation made it into the Promised Land. In time God turned them into a great nation and gave them a great king, David. And in David's day, "a long time later" says verse 7 (about four hundred years later than the Jews who died in the wilderness), God did something merciful. He "set a certain day, calling it Today." In other words, He offered Himself to yet another generation, David's generation. And He spoke through David these words, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Sound familiar? They come from Psalm 95:7-8, and it's the third time the writer has quoted these same words (first in 3:7, then in 3:15, and now here). One commentator suggests that this repetition is like a bell constantly tolling: "Today, harden not; today, harden not."<sup>13</sup>

The point is that the promise of God's rest remains. Today is a new day, and with every Today a new generation faces the same decision that the Jews faced in the Sinai desert. David faced it. The readers of this letter faced it. We're facing it right now. It's the decision, "If you hear God's voice, if you hear His offer of rest, what will you do?"

"Well, that rules out me," you say. "I've never heard God's voice." Really? Take another look at the first two verses of Hebrews, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days *he has spoken to us by his Son* (Heb 1:1-2)."

God spoke to the world by sending His Son, Jesus the Messiah. Have you heard of Jesus? Then you've heard the voice of God offering you His rest. And here's a piece of God-inspired counsel for you... *If you hear God's voice, don't harden your hearts.*

You're hearing God's voice right now, for you are hearing His Word proclaimed. But it's not enough just to hear with your *ears*. It's not even enough to engage your *fingers* and take notes. The question is, what's happening in your *heart*?

The Jews heard God's offer with their ears, but they hardened their hearts and gave in to their feelings of fear. Don't do that, says God's Word to us. Don't harden your hearts to His voice, for if you do you will miss His rest.

You say, "I don't want to miss God's rest, so what should I do?" We'll find out beginning in verse 9, but first the writer of Hebrews wants us to think about a third group. As far as God's rest goes, some will enter it. Some, like the Jews in the wilderness, will miss it.

**C. Some experienced a taste of it (8).** "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later

about another day.”

The writer apparently is responding to the would-be objector who says at this point, “You say the Jews missed God’s rest, but what about Joshua and that second generation? They experienced it, didn’t they?” And to that objection, the writer acknowledges in verse 8, yes...

1. *Joshua gave God’s people rest.* He gave them *Canaan* rest, the promised land, a piece of geography in the Middle East . But was Canaan rest the full extent of God’s rest? No, it was just a taste of it.

2. *God said there was something better coming.* In fact, Canaan rest was a necessary means to something far better, something verse 9 calls *Sabbath-rest*.

If you have a KJV you’re probably thinking, “But my Bible says ‘Jesus’ in verse 8, not ‘Joshua.’ Why the difference?” There is no difference. Both ‘Jesus’ and ‘Joshua’ are English names, and in English they are different. Not so in Greek. *Iesous* is the name in the Greek text of verse 8, and to the Greek reader, ‘Jesus’ and ‘Joshua’ are one and the same name. ‘Jesus’ is the Greek form of the Hebrew name ‘Joshua.’

There may typology here. A type is defined as “a divinely ordained prefiguration in the Old Testament of some New Testament reality.”<sup>[4]</sup>

F. F. Bruce comments, “The parallel between the Old Testament ‘Jesus’, who led his followers into the earthly Canaan, and Jesus the Son of God, who leads the heirs of the new covenant into their heavenly inheritance, is a prominent theme of early Christian typology, and could scarcely have been absent from our author’s mind.”

So there’s the first implication. The promise of entering God’s rest remains. Here’s the second...

## II. Implication #2: The experience of God’s rest involves responsibility (9-11).

This takes us back to our question from a moment ago, “What must I do?” It’s not enough merely *not* to harden your heart to God’s Word. What positively must a person *do* to enter God’s rest? There’s a three-fold responsibility.

**A. To enter God’s rest you must believe that it exists (9).** “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.” This is a new word in Hebrews, *sabbatismos*. It’s translated ‘rest’ in the KJV and NKJV, but it’s actually a different Greek word from the one translated ‘rest’ elsewhere in Hebrews (*katapausis*, used in verses 1, 3, 5, 10, etc). It actually contains the root word “Sabbath” which is why it’s translated ‘Sabbath-rest’ in the NIV. You won’t find it anywhere else in the Bible. Some feel the author actually coined the word himself.

What are we told about this Sabbath-rest here? Two things initially, with more to follow...

1. *It’s available because of what God did.* Remember the sequence: God worked, then God rested, and in so doing God offered to people the fruit of His rest.

2. *It’s available for the people of God.* “There remains a Sabbath-rest *for the people of God.*” Which raises the question, *who* are God’s people? For fifteen centuries the answer to that question was *Israel* . The Israelites were the people of God. If you were a Gentile, a non-Jew, you were *not* part of the people of God.

We who are Gentiles tend to forget the precarious situation we were in. We would do well to meditate regularly on Ephesians 2:11-12, “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”

That’s what we *were*. We were *without God*. We were *not* the people of God. Which makes the following words

so amazing...Ephesians 2:13, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." God did something to make it possible for even Gentiles to become His people. Verse 13 says He brings those who were once far away from Himself near to Him, and how? "Through the blood of Christ." By means of the work Jesus accomplished on His cross, sinners, even Gentile sinners, can become God's people, and as God's people they can experience God's rest.

Answer this question. Why did Jesus die? "He died for *me*, for *my* sins," you say. And if you have trusted in Him, that's true, for by shedding His blood He took care of your sin problem. But that's not all He accomplished! He didn't just shed His blood to save individual sinners. He shed His blood to form a new people, a new entity called "the church." Ephesians 2:14-20 explains:

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

One night last week a pretty vicious storm went through our area. The same system caused a lot of damage and even loss of life a couple of states south of us. I heard a loud clap of thunder around 3:00 a.m., opened my eyes momentarily, and saw the flash of lightning. Then I closed my eyes and went back to sleep!

Answer this. Why was I able to rest in the middle of that storm? You might attribute it to my folly, and suggest I ought to get up and check for tornados on the radio. But actually, there's a principle at work. When your *shelter* is secure you can experience *rest*.

There is a shelter, my friend, for storm-battered travelers. There's a rest available to those who will become a part of the people of God, the church that Christ shed His blood to bring into existence.

To enter God's rest, here's where you must begin. You must believe that it exists. But let me clarify something. Am I saying that every person who comes into the church experiences God's rest? No. The *potential* for rest is found in the church because the church is the body of Christ, the people of God. But the church doesn't save a person. Christ alone can save a person. Which brings us to a second related responsibility.

**B. To enter God's rest you must *rest* (10).** "...for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." I'll say it again. To enter God's rest you must *rest*. That's not a play on words. It's an essential. It means...

1. *You cannot work your way to God.* Our "good works" are as filthy rags to a holy God, says Isaiah 64:6. "Not by works, lest anyone should boast," says Ephesians 2:9. Many think they're going to heaven because they are good people doing good things. But they're fooling themselves, says the writer of Hebrews, "for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work."

To rest from your own work means you stop entering into the satisfaction of your own accomplishments. Remember our definition? ***Rest is the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment.*** Think about the feeling you've had when you've completed an important task, like finishing a big project at work. There was a good feeling, wasn't there, a satisfaction that comes from accomplishment. "Look what I just did!" you thought to yourself.

That's a thought a person *won't* think in heaven. If you expect to say, "Look what I did, God, look at the good things I did for you. They are at least part of the reason why I am now entering Your rest," you will *not* enter His rest. No, if you want to enter His rest, then...

2. *You must enter into the satisfaction of **His** accomplishment.* Yes, it's *His* accomplishment, not *yours* that must be the object of your faith. "You died for us, Lord Jesus. You rose again for our justification. It's what *You* did

that I'm trusting in." That's what we'll be saying in heaven. In fact, they're already saying it there, at least in John's vision recorded in Revelation 5:9-10, "*You* are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because *you* were slain, and with *your* blood *you* purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. *You* have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

"Look what *You* did!" That's the testimony of heaven. And if that's your testimony, then you have a wonderful rest to look forward to. We are looking forward, says Hebrews 11:10, "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." In the words of 11:16, "to a better country, a heavenly one."

But wait. Verse 9 doesn't say this rest is yet *future*. It says it's a present experience, stating, "There *remains* a Sabbath-rest." And verse 10, "Anyone who *enters* God's rest *rests* from his own work." F. F. Bruce explains, "Of this city of God men and women of faith are citizens already, although the full exercise of their civic privileges in it is reserved for the future."<sup>15</sup>

Think of it this way. To enter God's rest you must enter into the satisfaction of what He has accomplished for you—justification, forgiveness, adoption into God's family, and so much more, all accomplishments of His for us. But there is a sense in which He is still working on something. Remember His words? "I am going to prepare a place for you," He said in John 14:2. And one day, He's coming for us, and those who have entered His rest will enter His rest!

But there's another aspect to this responsibility. It's a package deal. To enter God's rest, first, you must believe that it exists (verse 9), and second, you must rest from your own work (verse 10), but there's a third element.

**C. To enter God's rest you must exhibit grace-enabled obedience (11).** "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."

That's ironic, isn't it? Verse 10 said we must *rest* to enter God's rest, but verse 11 says we must exert *effort* to enter His rest. Is that a contradiction? No. God's Word never contradicts itself. If I see an apparent contradiction it's because my theology is skewed, for God cannot lie which means His Word cannot contain contradictions. So when I see what *appears* to be a contradiction, I need to take the posture, not of a judge, but of a servant. And instead of looking *down* on the text, I need to get on my knees and put myself *under* the text, and ask the Spirit of God for wisdom.

Look again at the text, and let's observe two things together.

*1. Our obedience requires effort.* "Let us make every effort to enter that rest."<sup>16</sup> The verb means "to strive earnestly," "to give haste." It's the opposite of what the Israelites in the desert did, who in their spiritual apathy refused to trust and obey God, and consequently, instead of entering the promised Canaan rest they forfeited God's rest.

"Don't let that happen to you!" the writer of Hebrews is saying to us. "Don't squander the opportunity God is giving you to enter His rest." Keep in mind the context. Some of the original audience were considering turning from Christ back to their old beliefs and practices. "Don't do that!" Hebrews pleads. "Put everything you've got into entering that rest," which means "Put all your confidence in Christ who is your rest. And don't let anything turn you away from Him!"

It takes effort, brothers and sisters in Christ. Entering into Christ's Sabbath-rest doesn't mean we enter into a life of passivity and inactivity. To use the language of Ephesians 2:8-10, we're not saved by our works, but we are saved unto good works.

But if that's true, won't we be able to claim to have had some part, even if it's a small part, in our entrance into His eternal rest? No. And that's because our obedience isn't ultimately *our* obedience. Rather...

*2. Our obedience is the fruit of His rest.* We don't have the innate ability to render pleasing obedience to God, which means we can't do anything to save ourselves or even to keep ourselves saved. But what we lacked God graciously provided for us in Christ. The ability to believe in Him is His gracious gift. So is the ability to obey Him

after He's saved us. When we enter into the satisfaction of His accomplishment, He gives us everything we need. His accomplishment makes our obedience possible.

We actually see this connection between *rest* and *works* in the Revelation 14:13, "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will **rest** from their labor, for their **deeds** will follow them.'"

Remember the woman at the beginning, the one who was worried she wasn't going to heaven? Remember her problem? She went to a church that worked up her emotions, and consequently, she took a feeling-based rather than a faith-based approach to God. Perhaps you can relate. If so, please know that the promise of entering God's rest still stands, but to enter God's rest you must do the following. You must *believe* that His rest exists. And you must rest in the accomplishment of Christ—enter into the satisfaction that comes from His accomplishment. And then you must exhibit grace-enabled obedience. It's time to take inventory.

Take Inventory: Ponder the following...three bottom-line realities.

1. *If you really believe in Jesus you will experience His rest. That's a fact.*
2. *If you are resting in Jesus you will stop searching for something else. That too is a fact. And so is this...*
3. *If you are experiencing God's rest, you won't want to keep it to yourself. So let's share it with others this week!*

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**\*\*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] Pernicious means "destructive, harmful, deadly."

[2] Ichabod Spencer, *A Pastor's Sketches*, pp. 174-5.

[3] Donald Guthrie, p. 114.

[4] P. S. Karleen, *Handbook to Bible Study*

[5] F. F. Bruce, p. 78.

[6] Note he doesn't say "*you*," but "*us*." He includes himself in this exhortation.