

We ended last week's message on the rest of God without really finishing the author's thought because of time constraints. So today we continue with the conclusion of the warning of being sure that we enter God's rest. That rest is not only salvation that is a rest from the labors of the Laws of Moses, but also a rest from striving to please God by works, and instead, allowing the Holy Spirit in us to bring us victoriously through each day in the good works God has planned for us in advance (Ephesians 2:10).

We are all so uniquely fashioned. Some of us need a mental acceptance of an idea to help us take hold of it and apply it. Others are more attuned to being moved in their heart by the love of God to take a His direction. And yet others need a combination of the two. I'm more on the cerebral side. The understanding that everything has been done by the end of the sixth day of creation, and that I just need to enter God's seventh day, yielding to His Spirit, and watching Him bring His will to pass, which will be the best for me and for His glory, has really liberated me to trust Him more. It's not that I doubt that God works all things together for good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28). I mistakenly overemphasized my part in making that happen. I wasn't resting in God's completed work. I could see that salvation was a work of God alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). I just couldn't see how walking in victory every day of life is all His work as well. I hope that makes some sense to you. Entering God's rest is relying upon God to be all we need on a moment by moment basis.

The words with which the author addressed these Jewish believers, indicates that they were born again believers (Hebrews 3:1). Yet, the fear of persecution and their plotting and planning as to how to escape it caused them to miss out on that daily experience of God's rest. The Old Testament passage He used to exhort them warned them of falling short because of unbelief (Psalm 95:10-11). They seemed to think God could save their soul, but couldn't empower them to walk victoriously through the struggles of life.

What are you facing? Whether it is financial, relational, physical, or emotional, you can rest in God. He is more than able. In fact, it is already done. The God who lives in the eternal now has seen you through before the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:3). Now just walk it out in total trust, leaning on Him, and praising Him all the way. According to Psalm 50:14 and 15, calling on God in the day of trouble is right up there with sacrifices of thanksgiving and will result in us glorifying Him.

After the warning to take care lest they fail to enter that rest because of unbelief, the author reminded the readers what his use of Scripture was doing in them. *¹² For 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.* Hebrews 4:12 The Word of God is alive and active. It isn't just print on paper. It isn't just another story or someone's creative imagination. This is the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). It is the truth of God. It is

eternal, pure, powerful, and unchanging (Psalm 12:6). That is what the author had shared. That is what we share when we use the Word of God for advice, for encouragement, and for instruction. It gets into our spirit. It has the power to transform us. This whole concept of being in the seventh day is transforming the way I see every conflict and every victory. The Word is alive in us. If you have heard it and mixed it with faith (Hebrews 4:1), it is alive in you. It was at work in the first recipients.

The Word will separate between soul and spirit. This is an important point we should understand. Your soul is your mind, will, and emotions. Your spirit is the part of your being where the Spirit of God resides in and directs you. Our biggest problem is discerning the difference. Is my will the voice of the Holy Spirit? Are my thoughts His or my own? Is this feeling I have from my brain chemistry or is it the Spirit of God in me? How do we know? The author has given us the answer. The double edged sword of the Word of God separates the two. **God's Word can reveal if a thought was from our self or inspired by the Spirit.**

In this Hebrew church, they had a great idea. Was it of God? "Just slip back into Judaism and worship the shadows instead of the realities (Hebrews 10:1). After all, it's really the same thing isn't it?" And so the mind conveniently justifies anything by which we might avoid some discomfort. The author told them that what they were doing had been addressed in Psalm 95. They were hardening their hearts like their forefathers did at Massah and Meribah (Psalm 95:7-8). They were provoking God. The real problem was that they were not entering into the rest of the seventh day. They did not trust God to see them through the inevitable persecution. Fear took over, so they searched for answers from their mind, will, and emotion, which is a soulish response. That is what their ancestors did on the border of the Promised Land. That is what they did when they were without water. Now that the author has shared the Word of God, it has made a distinction. It has shown them the difference between soul and spirit. It has discerned the thoughts and intents of the heart. The same thing happens to us.

We are so familiar with verse 12, and yet, seeing it in context makes it so applicable to our own lives. You have probably had it happen as you read Scripture or listened to a sermon. All of the sudden, the verse or words are God clarifying for you the difference between your thoughts and His. Have you ever wanted to resolve a problem in some way and thought you had a great idea, but the Word of God suddenly comes and convicts you of that thought? The sword of the Word suddenly separates soul and spirit and we know which is which. Suddenly we can discern that the thoughts and intents of our heart had not been in line with the Spirit.

The next verse describes in a graphic way how this works. *¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.* Hebrews 4:13 When the Word of God addresses our situation there is no hiding. It doesn't do any good to pretend you don't understand. The Word just lays our

heart out in the open. It reminds me of the time Nathan told the parable to David. When Nathan said, "You are the man," there it was. David's sins, adultery, murder, rejection of the Holy Spirit's conviction, injustice, it was all there exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (2 Samuel 12:7).

The Greek word for "exposed" is used only here in the Bible. It is a graphic word from which we get "trachea." Combined with the sharp double edged sword here it is a picture of a man with sword point under his chin forcing him to look up into the eyes of his accuser. What a picture of what the Word does. It forces us to look into the face of God and confess the wickedness in our hearts and minds. That is quite uncomfortable, and yet the child of God knows how needful we all are of these surgeries performed by the living and active Word of God. That is why we avoid the Word when we are in rebellion. You know you are going to be confronted. **When we are walking in the Spirit we invite those surgical dealings and are thankful for the healing they bring to us.**

It is interesting to me how the division of our chapter came about. Most sermons divide the chapter between verse 13 and 14. Because of the length of last week's sermon we ended up with this division between 11 and 12. That puts us with two diverse topics in one message, the convicting power and discernment the Word brings to our life, and the comfort of Jesus our great high priest. Yet, perhaps they are not so diverse as they first appear. Jesus is the Word made flesh. In His earthly ministry, He not only spoke words of comfort, but also words of conviction that laid open the hearts of men. He is the double edged sword who is alive and active. He is the One who helps us separate soul and spirit and discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts. This honesty is hard to face but is so necessary and is, in the end, quite comforting.

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Hebrews 4:14 The One to whom we must give an account is Jesus. Thankfully, He is the believer's great high priest. This is the only place in Scripture where Jesus is called "the great high priest." When the author penned this letter, the temple was still standing and there was a high priest serving in the temple, a Sadducee appointed by Rome (Hebrews 8:13). The office of high priest was just a shadow of what Jesus would be to us (Hebrews 9:11-14).

The author was drawing a conclusion from his exhortation from Scripture. This very Word of God that is living and active has warned us against unbelief and failing to enter God's rest. It has caused us to look into God's face and confess our sin. But He has also ascended to the right hand of God to intercede for us, presenting His perfect sacrifice of Himself on our behalf. What better advocate could we have than the very Son of God? (1 John 2:1) And since that is the case, grasp firmly the confession that Jesus is Lord. Don't allow fear in your heart or the reasoning of your mind to keep you from living in God's rest that promises to see you through whatever you will face.

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15 Why should we be so encouraged that Jesus represents us to the Father? After all, He is also the One who convicts us of sin and exposes our sin. First, the reason to be grateful is that He is there to justify us, not condemn us (John 3:17). Secondly, **He sympathizes with our weaknesses. Sympathize is a compound word in Greek meaning to feel with us. He feels with us what we experience.** If you lost a loved one, He felt your loss with you. He feels how difficult it is for us to go on. No one else can do that like Jesus. His earthly father died before His ministry began. He was surely quite close to Joseph. He wept with those at Lazarus' tomb even though He knew He would raise Lazarus (John 11:35). He felt their grief with them. He felt their sense of helplessness in the face of the power of the grave. Jesus feels with us how hard it is to resist temptation, for that is one of our great weaknesses, the pull of the flesh (Galatians 5:17).

What is amazing is that He feels with us, even though He went through the same experiences without sinning. We tend to be judgmental about those with vices we have been victorious over, yet Jesus is not that way with us. He was victorious over it all, and yet He feels with us. He can look into the future and see the end result of His work in our lives, the completion of the work God has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). He can see us as the bride ready for our marriage with Him (Revelation 19:7).

Because of His gracious and compassionate heart, because He will tell it to us like it is, because He feels with us, and because He has faced the temptations we face without sinning, *¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:16 While we should have a fear of God's discipline, even if we become rebellious and disobedient (Hebrews 12:6), if we are repentant, we don't need to fear coming to Him in our time of need. As I stated earlier, He delights in us looking to Him for our needs to be met. One author suggested that our difficulties, trials, and emergencies are "divinely provided vessels for the Holy Spirit to fill, and if you but rightly understood their meaning, they would become opportunities for receiving new blessings and deliverances which you can get in no other way." A.B. Simpson **The author of Hebrews is telling us that we should take our vessels of needs confidently to the throne of grace to have them filled.**

I love the name of the throne of Jesus, "the throne of grace." While He is the Judge, to us, His throne is a throne of grace. It was by grace that we were saved (Ephesians 2:8). It is grace that leads us through to sanctification, for we are so often uncooperative. It is grace that feels with us in our weaknesses. We are so frequented with the grace of God that we often take it for granted. Yet, He is gracious about that as well, and continues to shower on us more grace. There is no end to grace for those who keep looking to Him. But the author has warned the readers to continue to hold firm our confidence and our boasting in Jesus to the end and not allow our hearts to be

hardened. When we understand we are recipients of grace, it doesn't cause us to be careless about sin, but rather to despise being seduced by it (Romans 6:1-2).

We can draw near with confidence because Jesus has given Himself for us. We have His righteousness in God's eyes (Romans 1:17). What spendthrifts we can be when we come to the storehouse of heaven with its endless supply of strength and provision! **We sometimes pray as if God was a tightwad or didn't have enough goodness to spread around liberally. Mercy and grace are there for us in abundance to help us in our time of need.**

What kind of answers would we receive if we marched into heaven's storehouses and claimed every fruit of the Spirit in abundance to be expressed in our lives for the glory of God (Galatians 5:22-23)? Can we pray this prayer? Father, I am weak but You are strong. I have failed but Your Son has prevailed on my behalf. Thank you for the love that sent Him and His love for me that endured the cross. I know there is no good thing You would withhold from me (Romans 8:32). Now, please pour out Your grace on me and make me a person of spiritual might for Your glory. Give me boldness to speak or wisdom to be silent. Strengthen me by the power of Your might to endure hardship with praise on my lips and song in my heart. Let others see Jesus in me. Help me surrender fully and instantly to the Holy Spirit that You might use me for little things or great things. Help me to know the contentment that comes from obedience when no one sees or will ever know. I have this particular weakness and that one, so I ask that You help me see temptations' lies and give me strength to prevail over them every time. And when my life is done, may it be said of me for Your glory, "He (or she) loved Jesus with all his heart and lived only for Him." I know I can't do this, but I know you can and will. And by Your grace when I get to those gates that lead to my eternal home may I hear You say, "Well done good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21) Amen! Amen? Now *that* is coming to the throne of grace with confidence. Will you do that?

This very morning in the devotional, Streams in the Desert (June 5), I read the following, which was drawn from the example of Elijah praying for rain (1 Kings 18:41f). *We must keep on praying and waiting upon the Lord, until the sound of a mighty rain is heard. There is no reason why we should not ask for large things; and without doubt we shall get large things if we ask in faith, and have the courage to wait with patient perseverance upon Him,* and I would add that while we wait we continue to do what we already know God's Word and His Spirit has instructed us to do.

Never think something is too petty to take to God. Never think you are bothering Him with your prayers. Never think you are asking for something too great if it is for His glory. He loves it when you depend on Him in your time of need. His arms are always open. Why go to the phone, when you can go to the throne?

Questions

- 1 What were the recipients of the letter missing out on and why?
- 2 When did God see you through your present difficulty?
- 3 What does the Word do in you?
- 4 How do you know the difference between your thought and the voice of the Spirit?
- 5 What picture is presented in verse 13?
- 6 Why do we have mixed feelings about this process?
- 7 What do our two topics have in common?
- 8 Why should we go to Jesus in our weaknesses?
- 9 Why should we have confidence to go to Jesus in prayer?
- 10 What should we expect when we do?
- 11 What will you ask when you pray?