

## Hebrews 4:1-11 – June 13, 2021

### *Why My Christian Life Is So Dry?*

JD Farag

Good morning and welcome to our second service. On Sunday mornings, we have two services. The first of which is our Bible Prophecy Update, and now this second service is our verse-by-verse study through the Bible. We are currently in the book of Hebrews. Last week we finished chapter 3, and I know this is deeply profound, but what comes after three is four, so we're going to be in chapter 4 today, Lord willing, the first 11 verses. So, I'll invite you at this time to turn there.

While you're doing that, I want to let you know that we are really excited to have Dr. Ed Hindson from Liberty University here next week. He will be speaking at both services this upcoming Sunday, June 20th. It also happens to be Father's Day, by the way. I am going to take a couple of weeks off. Yeah! Oh, thank you! I guess that's better than You can't take time off, I guess. Here's the thing; this will be the first Father's Day that I have not been in the pulpit in over 20 years. I'm not going to be here. But you're going to want to be here, and I'll tell you why. Dr. Hindson sent me his notes for the teachings on Sunday. Oh, my goodness! So that's this Sunday and both services.

Then Pastor Mac is going to fill in for me on Thursday night for the midweek Bible study, and the following Sunday, which will be the 27th, Pastor Mac will be teaching. Then I will be back, Lord willing, get this. The following Sunday, do you know what that Sunday is? The 4th of July. Did you know that it falls on a Sunday this year? So yeah, I'll be back on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July here. We're going to be here. We're going to have our own fireworks here on the 4th of July Sunday morning, Lord willing. I should always preface it that way.

All right. Let's get started. I'm really looking forward to what the Lord has for us in his Word. I'll ask you to stand if you're able; if not, where you're seated is fine. We're going to pick it up in verse 1 Hebrews Chapter 4. "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. For we also [verse 2] have had the good news proclaimed to us just as they did. But the message they heard was of no value to them because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.

Now [verse 3], we who have believed enter that rest just as God has said. So, I declared on oath in my anger; they shall never enter my rest. And yet, his works have been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words, 'On the seventh day, God rested from all his works.'

Again [verse 5] in the passage above, he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' Therefore, since it still remains for some to enter that rest and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, God again set a certain day calling it "Today." This he did when, a long time later, he spoke through David [speaking of the Psalms], as in the passage already quoted: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.

There remains then [verse 9], a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us [verse 11], therefore, make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience."

Whew! Let's pray. Thank you, Lord. Lord, we readily admit that the passage before us today is such that unless the Holy Spirit gives us understanding, we're not going to be able to see what it is that you want to show to us today. Nor are we going to hear, let alone understand, that which you desire to speak into our lives today. We desperately need the Holy Spirit as we just got done singing to open up the eyes of our heart, open up the eyes of our understanding. Lord, open this passage up to us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen and amen. You can be seated. Thank you.

I want to talk with you today about why it is that Christians don't have to remain in the desert as it were, resulting in a dry and barren Christian life. It's sad, really, but many a Christian has forfeited the

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promises of God by tying the hands of his blessings with the ropes of one's unbelief. Now, I have to preface the teaching today this way; if you could just, please hear me out.

This particular teaching, this particular passage, is one that the enemy will do everything and stop at nothing to keep you from understanding, and it's already started. Just as we were reading it, I think if we're honest with ourselves, what? Rest? Joshua, David? Huh? There's still a Sabbath rest? What does that mean? Today, while it's called today?

It seems like a firm grasp of the obvious, but yet we know that all Scripture is God-breathed. It's here for a reason, and Satan knows that reason. Spoiler alert! Satan knows Scripture better than you, and I know Scripture. This particular passage of Scripture is one that he does not want us to understand because it has the propensity to change our Christian lives forever. We never have to look back, and he knows it.

Here's the thing. Before we come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, Satan is all about keeping us from Christ. He'll do everything, stop at nothing to keep us from coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. But we get saved; he has to regroup, calls an emergency meeting. JD got saved; we need to re-strategize here. We can no longer keep him from Christ, but here's what we are going to try to do. We're going to try instead to distance him from Christ. How are we going to do that? Oh, we're going to crush him under the weight of works and the guilt that comes packaged when he fails under the banner of those works. Let's keep him trying and trying and trying, and as he keeps trying and trying and trying, he will keep failing and failing and failing. And when not if he does, you guys get down there, and you finish the job.

Because he wants to keep you away from Jesus and the longer, he can keep you away from Jesus – you are saved. But he doesn't want you going to the cross because see, that forgiveness that awaits you is there for you, available to you, and it should take you no longer to get there as long as it takes to get to the cross.

So, Satan will come in and say, hey, whoa! After what you did, I would kind of lay low for right now if I were you. It's pretty bad. Yeah, I know it was. You're not going to go to church, are you? No, I probably better not. I mean, if the person next to me knew what I did. Don't look at the person next to you right now, whatever you do. You see, he wants to keep us in the wilderness and the bareness of guilt and condemnation so we don't enter into the promise of rest and forgiveness and salvation and rest from works. How's that for an introduction? Are we good? Are you guys okay? Do you want to leave? We can bow our heads; close our eyes. You can slip out if you want. If not, let's do this.

Three ways; you might find more in the text, but I found three ways that we as Christians can get out of this barren desert and enter into the promises that are ours if we would but believe.

One last thing before we jump in, the enemy will try to distract you. He'll try to get your mind to wander on something else he'll bring to your mind. He has access to your thoughts; he can't read your thoughts. Thank God for that, but he can sure plant thoughts in your mind. He's going to try to put some thought in your mind about something you've got to do maybe later today so that you'll miss something that the Lord has for you today. Don't let him do that.

Here's another way he'll try; he probably already has. As I'm going through these, he's going to put that thought in your mind like, wow, this is really complicated. It's not! In fact, the opposite is true. This is actually so simple. It could be argued that it's too simple and that's the problem. This rest that is ours, these promises that are ours that await us await us if we would just believe we could enter into this.

The first one is in verses 1 and 2, and it's "Mixing with Faith." Let me explain this. Here the writer of Hebrews explains how the good news, the message, the Gospel, the Word, the promises of God that were proclaimed were of no value, speaking of the Israelites. Why? Because they didn't mix it with

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faith. Some of your translations render it "mix with faith." It wasn't the failing of the Israelites that kept them from entering the Promised Land. It was the failing to mix God's promise with faith.

God already knew they would fail. God already knows we're going to fail and fall and sin. Can you imagine if God were surprised if we sinned again after we told him we wouldn't? We even promised him we wouldn't. We even made a vow, "I'll never do that again!" Could you imagine? Okay, you'd better not. And then you do it. Could you imagine God in heaven going? That's it! You said you wouldn't do that again. I have told you till I'm blue in the face. How many times have I told you? And we think God is angry with us, and that's what causes us to keep our distance from him instead of drawing near to him. We know that, but here's the problem. We don't mix the Word of God, the promises of God, with faith. In other words, merely hearing the Word of God and the promises of God are inconsequential, absent this mixing it with faith.

The best illustration I ever heard in this regard is what happens when you mix hydrogen with oxygen. The hydrogen is merely hydrogen by itself, and so too is oxygen, merely oxygen by itself. I know again, very deeply profound, right? However, when you mix hydrogen with oxygen, the hydrogen molecules react with oxygen when the existing molecular bonds break and new bonds are formed between oxygen and hydrogen atoms. This reaction then results in an explosive release of energy and produces what we know as - wait for it: water. H<sub>2</sub>O: hydrogen and oxygen.

You don't have any water. No wonder you're so dry and parched and thirsty for the water of life, the water of God's Word. Make no mistake about it. He's at the ready to satiate that thirst in our lives, that hunger in our lives. He's there waiting, and all we have to do is just mix the Word of God with faith in God, and that's what happens.

The second one is in verses 3 through 8, and it's "Trust in Obedience." Again, let me explain this one. If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the greatest hindrances to living a victorious Christian life, let me flip that around; bear with me.

Many live a defeated Christian life. How do you think that makes God feel? Have you ever thought of it like that? Let me ask you as a parent, even a grandparent. How do you feel when your children, your grandchildren are living in defeat, constantly defeated, failing, falling, discouraged? Wouldn't that break your heart? How much more does it break the heart of God, especially when he has all of this available for us for the asking? Just ask me. Ask anything. Anything? Anything. If it's according to my will and it brings glory to God, I'm going to give it to you.

I mean, come on, earthly parents. Your kid comes up to you and asks you for bread; are you going to give him a stone? They ask for fish; are you going to give him a snake? And you are loving earthly fallen parents and fathers, how much more your heavenly Father? He's going to give it to you if it brings glory to him.

I picture God, and this has been a process over many, many years in my Christian walk because early on, I saw my heavenly Father through the lens of my earthly father with whom I did not have a good relationship with. My earthly father was always angry with me. I gave him good reason to always be angry with me, but, man, I tried to keep my distance from him. It took me so long, and it is a process over time as you get to know your heavenly Father and how much he loves you

Then you start realizing, man; he really loves me. He loves me so much that there's nothing I can do to make him love me less. It cannot happen. Yeah, but I blew it; like he's surprised? That's why he sent his only begotten Son to die for us so that whosoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus said I've come to give you life and life more abundantly.

It's kind of interesting because right before that, he says the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. He wants to steal your joy. He wants to kill your hope. He wants to destroy your Christian life because he hates you. But I have come that you might have life more abundantly.

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Please, it's so sad that that has been taken out of context and put into the arena of the financial. God wants you to have an abundant life, and right now, there's somebody out there that's going to have a gift. Thank you for laughing, by the way. How sad is that? That's not what he is talking about. He's talking about a victorious life, an abundant life. Now that's living as we call it, right? As we say it, man, that's living! That's the life Jesus came and died for to give us, and we don't enter into it.

The writer of Hebrews here is talking about this: entering into this rest and don't be like them in their disobedience. When you connect the dots, you realize that what he's saying here is: Don't try harder in the energy of your own strength to do better and not disobey, rather than simply trusting in obedience instead of trying to avoid disobedience.

Let me kind of explain that just a little bit. Isn't that how we are? Picture the scene. You blow it. Okay, Lord, I'm sorry; forgive me, and he forgives you. 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness." That's a done deal; That's a given. You're forgiven, okay? But now you kind of come in behind that, and you're thinking, okay, I'm going to try harder. I'm going to do better. I'm not going to do that again, and you make a vow, God... And you promise God. How's that working out for you? It's like after a church service like this, in a sermon like this, in your heart, you say, okay Lord, and you make it about as far as Kam Highway. Am I right?

Why is that? Because you're trying - not trusting. What do you mean? Oh! Here we go! Satan wants you to live in trying. He doesn't want you to live in trusting because, see, if I live in trusting, then I'm walking in righteousness and victory.

How does that work? Because he already did it! I don't ever do anything. Wait a minute, Pastor, with all due respect, not so fast. You're going to give people the impression that every time they blow it, hey, what's the point? I can just ask for forgiveness, and I can go on just doing whatever I want because I can always ask for forgiveness. Accent added; sorry, I don't know where that came from.

The opposite is true again because you see, when you've tasted from the "cup of grace," you don't want to sin against God like that when you realize that it's the kindness of God that leads a man to repentance. God is so gentle and gracious and loving and merciful and kind.

See, here's the enemy trying to get us to think that God's angry with us. He's kind of had it with us. And here's God going; I love you so much. I've already paid for that. You don't have to do anything. It's already been done. The work has already been finished. When you're finished with your work, what do you do? Rest. Thank you. Oh, you guys! I love you so much. You guys are amazing. Maybe I'm preaching to the choir; I don't know.

That's what God's saying. Why are you trying? Why are you working? It's finished. It is finished. Just rest and trust in that; it is finished. There's nothing you can do to add to it. What, like I need you to help me out on this? God, you did your part. I'll take it from here. Don't do that! God has already finished the work for us and instead of us. Do you know what that means? All we need to do is simply trust in his finished work.

Ephesians 2:8-9, you know it well. We quote it always in the context of evangelism, but I want to draw your attention to something that's here. Not easily seen at first read because we're too familiar with it. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, and he says, verse 8, chapter 2, "For it is by grace you have been saved." Okay, we got that, right? We're saved by grace.

But then he says this; it's a qualifier, "through faith." Whoa! That's a game-changer right there. You know what he just did there, don't you? We're saved by grace. That's the good news. The message, the Gospel, the Word of God, the promise of God, but it's through mixing it with faith and this, not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works lest anyone should boast.

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In other words, you're saved by grace through faith, and you had nothing to do with it. Wait a minute; I had something... No, you didn't. Because if you did, then that would be works. How so? Well, think about it. If I had to bring something to the "table of salvation," the implication is that I have to do something. Uh-uh. I don't have to do anything. No. He did it. There's nothing I need to. No.

In fact, it's kind of like when our kids were small, and they want to help us. It's so adorable, right? And you say to them, and you want to help me? Don't help me. That would help me because if you help me, then it's going to make it worse and take me a lot longer, and then I've got the mess to clean up after. I mean, it's adorable; I'll do it.

I know that's a silly way to illustrate it, but I think you get the point, don't you? Well, is there anything I can do to help God? No. You are saved by grace through faith. It's almost like, I don't mean to be offensive. I mean, if you think about it, the Gospel is offensive because the Gospel is that you're saved by grace, which implies that you're a sinner. You need to be offended. I would rather offend somebody into heaven than flatter somebody into hell.

The Gospel is offensive, and it's meant to offend because you're the offender. How about that? You've transgressed the law of God. You've fallen short of the glory of God. You've sinned against God, and now you need a Savior, and the Savior is going to save you by grace, unmerited favor. You did absolutely nothing to deserve it. In fact, truth be known...

I don't mean to point. I'm sorry when I do that because... I should probably do it like this, so nobody feels singled out. I always know I shouldn't do that when somebody starts crawling under the chair. I'll do it like this just...

It could be argued that God saved you by his grace through faith - despite yourself. I mean, if it was left up to you? Forget about it. If we had to bring anything to the "table of salvation like, hey, I haven't murdered anybody. Okay, come on over. We can talk. You? No can. You know what the implication of that is, right? That means that you contribute; you have to bring something in and of yourselves.

We just got done hearing that it's not from yourselves. If you had to do something to deserve salvation, that's not grace. That's earned, merited, and here's the problem. We live meritoriously. Is that the word? Meritorious Christian lives. Do you know what I mean by that? That everything that we have from the Lord, starting with our salvation, was merited.

Here's what that looks like this week, starting today, by the way. Hey, pretty good day; I went to church. I tithed. Tomorrow morning, the alarm clock goes off; I spent time in the Word in prayer. I am doing pretty good. Yeah, like God's up there with his checklist. Alright, good, check, church Sunday, Word, and prayer. Monday, tithed. It's a big check so let's give him two checks, like a merit badge, right? Then the blessing of God on our lives that week, and we start trying to connect it like, oh that's because I was a good boy; I was a good girl.

Well, what about when you're not? You know I blew it, slept in. I didn't even watch online. Forget tithing online. I didn't even do that. I haven't been in the Word. I haven't spent any time in prayer. Man, I'm going to get it. Oh really? Is that how you live your Christian life? If it is, it ought not to be because God's not up there, keeping count, keeping score, checking off the checklist.

I don't mean to bring in this, but maybe I need to, the whole Christmas thing, that one song that's always bugged me, especially later in life, you know, Santa Claus is coming to town. He's got a list. He's checking it twice to see if you've been naughty or nice. I'm not getting anything for Christmas because I've been pretty naughty. [Laughter] I sure haven't been... Wait a minute. So, you're telling me that it's only going to be good if I'm nice. Okay, play nice, make nice. That's not how it works, and the reason that's not how it works is because that's works. That's not a play on words.

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That brings us to our third one, and actually, it ties in verses 9 through 11, "Rest from works." The rest that the writer of Hebrews refers to here is this rest from our own works to merit the favor of God and the blessing of God.

Example: You were very naughty this week. You were a bad boy; shame on you! And then God just, I mean, blesses you. Here's your response: What's this? God, why are you being so kind and gracious and generous to me? I was a bad boy. Oh, it's called grace. In fact, where did sin abound, there did grace much more abound.

There you go again, Pastor. What, are you saying that hey, the more I sin, the more grace? It doesn't work that way. It has the opposite effect. When God is gracious to you like that, it blesses you like that when you know what you've been like. I mean, it ruins you. I mean, it just floors you.

Let me say it like this, it woes you back to him. Whoa, Lord, I don't deserve this. I know. Lord, you're so good to me. I know. Lord, I have been really bad. I know. Lord, why are you doing it? Because I love you. I'm not angry with you. I took all of my anger, all of my wrath, and I put it on my only begotten Son who took your sin upon him, and he paid for it in full. You have no outstanding debt. It is paid for in full. It is finished: period; not comma, not semi-colon. It's not: It is finished, if... Well, that's a big if. It is finished, however... No, it is finished. The work is finished. Rest, rest.

Unless and until we realize that there is nothing, absolutely nothing we can do to add to what Jesus has already done, we will never enter into that rest. We are just going to remain like the Israelites in that barren wilderness; our Christian lives are dry.

Do you know what is interesting? I think about the Israelites with this. It's almost like you can get accustomed to it so that it becomes this normal to where anything else would be just so over the top. We can't see ourselves in that place. Here we are in the barren wilderness in our Christian lives, and if we would, but believe God to do the miraculous.

I wonder how many of us if we only knew what awaited us just for the asking? Why don't we ask? James says we have not because we ask not. I have a question. Okay, I get that. We have not because we ask not. Okay, but I have this question. Why don't we ask then? Because we don't believe, and we remain in the desert of unbelief. Oh, we are still saved! But here are all the promises of God, all the blessings of God there for the asking and we don't ask. And we don't ask because we don't believe.

Why don't we believe? Because we don't believe that we deserve it. We believe that God is going to check his checklist, that list that he's checking twice. So why bother to ask because he's going to look at that list and go, uh-uh! You ain't getting... Look at this. I know; I'm sorry I asked. I won't ask again. That's why we don't ask. Shred that list. Better yet, burn it because that's not the list.

He has a different list. Do you know what that list says on it? It's got this huge big red stamp with the blood of Jesus Christ, and it says, "Paid in full!" You are free and clear. Good news. That's what the word gospel needs.

No, I don't believe it. You don't believe? No, that's too good to be true—no such thing as a free lunch. I tell you, if I had a dollar for every time somebody said something like that, I could probably buy my wife a new vehicle.

I mean, really? Do you know what you're saying? Salvation is a gift. You're saying that there's no such thing as a gift of salvation. Where's the fine print? What's the catch? No, that can't... You're telling me that no matter what I do, it's been paid for in full? Yes. You're telling me that I can ask for anything, and if it's good according to his will and glorifies him, he's going to give it to me? Yeah. That's too good to be true. Here's what I say to one who would say it's too good to be true. If it's too good to be true, it's God because God is true.

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Let me say that again, in a different way. This whole notion of "too good to be true." God is too good because God is true; God, you're too good. I know. God, this is too good to be true. I am good, and I am true, so that's why it's too good to be true. I fit the bill for both. Yeah, but there is no such thing as a free lunch. Well, maybe there's no such thing as a free lunch. Okay, but there is such a thing as the gift of eternal life that is offered and freely given and freely received. No strings attached. Period; It is finished. So why are you striving and stressing? Could you put the word under your Christian life: stressed or rest?

One last thing, and then we'll close. I just thought of this. This, I think, is the Lord and may be for somebody here today. Pastor Chuck Smith, who is now with the Lord, wrote a book titled "Grace Changes Everything; How grace changes everything. A must-read; Absolutely just, I mean, life-changing.

In that book, he draws this parallel, this comparison, this illustration between a factory and a garden. When you walk into a factory, you smell perspiration. Sweat works, deadline, stress, produce, production when you walk into a garden, oh the fragrance. Oh, the peace, the quiet stillness in that garden. What a contrast: The factory is works; The garden is grace. Too many of us live our lives in the factory of works and not the garden of grace.

Why don't you stand? We'll have the worship team come up. They'll close us in song; we'll close in prayer. It's my hope, and my prayer that God has only he can would just break through however thick the layers are in our Christian lives so that we'll see his grace, taste from the delicious sweet cup of his grace. When you taste of the Lord and see that he is good, you're ruined, man. You're ruined for anything or anyone else when you've tasted from that cup.

I pray for anyone that might be here today or even watching online that's still in that bareness, in that wilderness. That ends right here and right now, today. Just believe. Trust. Rest. Oh, and one real final warning here: Hang on. No, I mean that. Hang on for dear life because you're going to have the time of your life.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you. Thank you for this passage here in your Word. At first read, it's kind of gnarly, but wow. When the Holy Spirit opens up the eyes of our understanding and opens it up to us, and we see it. We see! Oh, Lord, that's the kind of Christian life I want to be in and live and know. Lord, please, for anyone that's just dry and barren, joyless, I pray that today, they would just come to you and enter into all of the promises that await us. In Jesus' name. Amen.