

Good evening, my name is Claire Macfarlane and I have been at Cornerstone for 3 years. I'm married one of the piano players on Sunday morning. Our son is a-year-and-a-half and we have another one on the way arriving in May, Lord willing.

I wanted to take a minute at the beginning here and just let you know that if you're finding this study to be different or finding the questions to be hard, or just generally feeling frustrated, you're not alone. The questions each week are designed to help you think and really go deeper so your reactions are normal and good but don't let them stop you- let them propel you deeper into this study. It will force you to do what you wouldn't do otherwise. And even if you only do some of the questions each week, you're still doing it. So keep pressing on and just know that all of us are working at this and it's intended to be for our blessing and if you're struggling to do the study each day, just pray before you start and ask the Lord to help you understand His word and know Him more. The goal with all of this is that we see Christ in His beauty. If you remember from chapter 1 (verses 1-4) the author displayed Christ in all of His glory, and then goes on to more detail in each chapter so that we might see our Superior Savior and worship Him.

Today we are looking at Hebrews chapter 4: verses 1-13 and I want to just walk through it together to look at the flow of this chapter and consider the warning and the promises that are before us. You know, there are some pretty serious verses here and the author of Hebrews intended them to be serious. They are warnings given so that the hearers might escape certain consequences.

We've all experienced this, right? I can remember when I was young and I shared a room with my sisters and my mom and dad had put us to bed and told us we needed to be quiet; there was no talking and certainly no getting out of bed and that there would be a consequence if we disobeyed.

Well, the writer of Hebrews is telling us the same thing, "Take heed **today**". He wants the reader to respond in obedience. He is trying to **spare** us the consequences by giving us a stern warning and encouraging us with the promises of God.

So open your Bibles with me to Hebrews chapter 4 and let's look at it together.

1. The first point is to examine yourself with fear regarding salvation. We see this in verses 1-7 and I want to read verses 1 and 2,

*Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.*

These verses instruct us to:

a. Consider Israel's example

And the first thing we see is that they (i) had good news preached to them. As it said in verse 2, "*For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also...*" What does this mean? We know from our study that good news is the same as the word for "gospel" which is salvation in Christ through faith. So what the author is saying is that Israel, in the Old Testament, had the same gospel preached to them as we have had preached to us. There is equal opportunity for those who lived in the Old Testament era and for us, in the New Testament era to be saved. And there is no excuse. We have heard the good news. The warning is, "Today if you hear His voice don't harden your hearts."

Here's the problem: (ii) they did not hear with faith.

So going back to the illustration earlier: this was me thinking that my mom and dad weren't serious and that nothing was going to happen. That night I think we had company or something and we figured they were all downstairs and they'd never hear us tiptoe across the floor or whisper to each other.

This is also verse 2, "the word [or gospel]... did not profit them, because it was not united by faith..." In other words, they didn't really believe it, so they didn't change anything. Plus they thought they were doing just fine- that they would be acceptable to God because they did everything right and offered all the right sacrifices and didn't mix meat and milk and all the other laws and customs they followed. And we do this, too: we hear the gospel, but we add in morality, Bible knowledge, active ministry, or church attendance as a way of earning God's favor or proving we are "right" with God. We don't hear with faith. We hear and then go out and try to be good enough to make it all work. Or we just ignore it. But true salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone. Let us be warned that we do not follow Israel's example but instead hear the good news and respond "**with faith.**"

And here's the problem with Israel's lack of faith:

(iii) they were denied the rest of God.

When they disobeyed, there was a consequence as verse 3 tells us,

“as [God] swore in [His] wrath, they shall not enter My rest.” They failed to enter because of disobedience (verse 6b).

When my parents caught us disobeying that night, they said “Fine. You want to be up, you can be up.” So they let us be up but we had to sit outside, in the dark. Alone. I think I was probably 4 or 5 so this was a big deal. I was without fellowship, without light, without my parents, and I knew I was there by my own choice. My parents wanted me to escape this consequence by heeding their warning at the beginning. And as I sat outside in the dark totally freaked out, I wished super hard that I had listened to the warning and made a different choice and could be back in my cozy bed with my sisters. But I chose to disobey. And then it was too late; I had to take the consequences.

When God swears in His wrath that “they shall not enter My rest.” (verse 3) It was like saying, “Fine. You don't want My rest, you don't get it.” To be in God's rest is to have fellowship with Him. Israel was banned from that fellowship when they disobeyed and did not believe God in faith.

What do *I* do about it if I find myself living without faith? If I examine myself and realize I have refused God's rest? God's fellowship? What if I don't really know if I am saved?

b. then we turn to Christ. Verse 3 says, “*For we who have believed enter that rest...*” So ask yourself, “Am I hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and blinded?” Hebrews 3:13 reminds us that sin is very deceitful. In other words, we are not going to realize we are deceived and over time it hardens us so that we do not see our sin.

And simply ask God to open your eyes and then (i) repent. Turn from your sin. Mark 1:15 gives us clear instruction: “*...repent and believe in the gospel*”. And Hebrews 4:11 says,

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*“Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.”*

So here the opposite of repentance is “following the same example of disobedience”. In other words, don’t do what Israel did. Repent. Turn. Go the other way.

This idea of turning to God and repentance is an important step to this passage because if we hear the gospel with faith, we WILL repent. We turn away from our former sin....

So my son, Micah, knows when he sees a computer that he is not supposed to touch it. He knows it is disobeying to touch it; that it’s sin. But he *likes* to touch it so when he does, I tell him, “No, Micah”. And sometimes he looks right back at me with defiance in his eyes and reaches his hand out and touches it again. This is NOT turning from sin, right? This is willing, acknowledged indulgence in sin. And what is interesting is that the best way to help him to obey is a consequence: he gets a spanking, he tells me he’s sorry and asks for my forgiveness (which I help him to do) and then the next step is key: I physically turn him toward something he *can* play with. The goal is to teach him that when Mama says no, he turns away from that and finds something else to play with. And the picture I want to bring out here is what it looks like to truly repent and turn. It’s not just abstaining from the thing that has been a “no”, it’s a turning to something that is a yes.

After repentance you (ii) Believe. John 3:16 uses this very word, “whoever believes in Him shall not perish” and again in Hebrews 11:6,

*“...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”*

And it’s not too late to repent and believe. Hebrews says, there remains a rest for the people of God (verse 9) and it’s available “Today”! Don’t wait. Don’t harden your heart like Israel. Truly examine yourself to make sure that you have not come short of entering His rest.

Which brings us to the next point. We 2) consider the rest of God in 8-11.

First of all, let’s look at rest. a. What IS rest?

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(i) (Rest explored) Here's what I think of when I think of rest: I think of a break, or maybe a vacation. I think of sitting and NOT running around doing things; sometimes rest means mental rest- I think of my mind being at ease and calm, not worried about things. Or maybe it's sleeping; or what I do after I finish my chores. It might be a hundred other things for you.

But what does rest actually mean here? We see from Scripture that it has both a **physical** and **spiritual** aspect.

(ii) So here's a definition of rest (Rest defined). (And this is from our chapter 3 lesson from the definition page)

*“The rest promised by God to the Jews included the Promised Land but it was not limited to the Promised Land...it is important to remember that God's rest is both physical and spiritual.... Currently believers partially experience this rest as they await its fullness when Christ returns.”*

Entering God's rest means fellowship with God

So then the question becomes, (b) Are you resting (verse 11)? And how do you know if you're resting. Is it a feeling? Is it peace of mind? How do you know if you've entered the “Rest of God” or fellowship with God?

Let's turn to Genesis chapter 2. Here we see the paradise originally created by God, before sin- life perfectly at rest. We see fruitful work without toil (rest from labor), and open communion or fellowship with God (rest spiritually). Starting in verse 8 it says,

*“The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food: the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden;”*

skip down to verse 15, *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”*

We see next that God walked in the garden with the man and woman from verse 8 of chapter 3: *“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...”*

This is a beautiful picture of God’s rest: rewarding work and sweet fellowship with the Lord as He walked with them daily in the garden where all their needs were provided for.

When we are saved, we partially enter this kind of rest- we have fellowship with God restored through the work of Christ and we know that we don’t have to work physically for our salvation. The final rest, though, will be in the future when we truly rest from our toil and have face-to-face fellowship with Christ in heaven. Let’s take a look at that in Revelation—it’s surprisingly like the Garden of Genesis. Turn to Revelation 21 verse 1,

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’”*

Skip ahead to Revelation 22 verse 1,

*“ Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its*

*street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bondservants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.”*

I don’t know about you but that’s where I want to be. This is an awesome picture of our future rest with God. This is eternity with our Lord and Savior. There is no more curse; no more pain or death or miscarriage, or divorce, or car accidents, or

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suicide, or cancer, or disease, or betrayal...you will no longer battle pride, or jealousy, or strive against any fleshly desires. No more.

This is our ultimate rest that we eagerly look forward to. And it's interesting because these passages in Revelation also come with a warning similar to that of Hebrews. Look at Revelation 22:14. It says, "*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city.*" What is this "washing of the robes"? It is the same as hearing the good news and believing it in faith. In other words, when we hear the news of salvation, we believe God's word and Christ washes us white, covering us with HIS righteousness and making our robes clean.

So what should we do with all of this? Ask yourself these questions:

(i) "Do I believe in Christ Jesus"? "For we who believe enter that rest" as it says in Hebrews 4 verse 3.

Second (ii) Do I hold fast my confidence in Christ as we read in chapter 3:6 that we are Christ's "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."

Three, (iii) Do I obey God? Verse 11 says,

*"...let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience"*

So ask, "Do I obey God?" And then ask,

(iv) "Have I rested from my works and do I believe my salvation is by faith?"

*"For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works as God did from His."*

Which is what verse 10 tells us.

Again, this is a physical and spiritual rest. Work is good. Remember work was given to Adam and Eve before the fall- they were placed in the garden to tend and keep it. So this isn't rest from any kind of work, but a rest from a works-based faith and in the future a rest from the toil of physical work. And then,

(v) Do I look forward to a future, complete rest in heaven with the Lord?

With all this discussion on rest and entering God's rest and resting from your works, I think it might be helpful to take a moment to talk about works. So this is point

d. What about works?

First (i) Works are separate from salvation. Romans 5:1 shows that we are justified by faith, not works, Romans 5:6-8 says we were saved while we were ungodly; in other words, we didn't have works helping us. Ephesians 2:8-9 describes our salvation as being "apart from works". So it's pretty obvious we are not saved by works. It is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The second thing about works is that they

(ii) always go *with* faith: James 2:26 says, "...faith without works is dead". And Philippians 2:12-13 talks about this picture of how faith stands alone and yet works are present as evidence of God's work in your life. It says:

*"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling [in other words, do good deeds]; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* [In other words, it is all His ability in you that allows you to do works that please God.]

And (iii) works are **evidence** of true salvation. Entering His rest is a ceasing from "faith-by-works" but not a cease from work. First John is such a good book to turn to when you are looking for the evidences of salvation in your own life. In 1 John chapter 2 verses 3, 5, and 6 we read,

*"By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments... By this we know that we are in Him; the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."*

So the evidence of your salvation is walking as Christ walked; keeping His commandments; doing what He has called us to do- all actions that point back to our salvation being authentic. But just keep in mind, this is not perfection. Pastor John Marc often reminds us that our walk with the Lord is about **direction, not perfection**. We will not always obey; we will not always respond the way Christ

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would and that doesn't mean we aren't saved. The point is that when God truly saves us, we *desire* to please Him and honor Him with our actions.

OK, so we have looked at the importance of examining ourselves with fear regarding salvation, we have considered the rest of God, and now our last point, we will

3. consider the word of God. This is verses 12 and 13.

First, (a) What is the word of God?

This may seem kind of obvious but let's just clarify. It is your Bible. This is the word of God. This is the complete revealed word of God. God may bless you with a certain passage in new ways or you may find new application from the scripture or see something you never saw before. But there are no new "words from God"; there are no new prophecies; no new books to be added. This is it. But this isn't just a dead book. This is also a person, the Word of God is described as being with God and actually **being** God in John 1:1, "*And the Word was with God and the Word was God*" So what we have when we pick up our Bibles is an incredibly powerful, living book.

Look at how the (b) Word is described in Hebrews: Living, Active, Sharper than a 2-edged sword.

It says the word is piercing, that it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart (something not even you can see sometimes), that NOTHING is hidden from it.

Just look at the passage here and see how it starts by talking about the word as an "it" in verse 12 and then flows right into talking about it as a "He;" as Christ. There's no break in the thought or flow- both are interchangeable. This should cause us to, "fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it." as verse 1 says. Not only will the Word lay all bare and expose our sin, but we will stand before Him one day and give an account for what we did with His Word! His Son!

So we see all these incredible descriptions of the Word and see how powerful it is in our lives but how do we best

(c) Benefit from the word?

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Let's say you're **not saved** (unbelievers). How do you benefit from the Word of God? What can the Word do for you?

Be warned: the Word will expose your heart (v12b). It will convict you and open your eyes to see your sin and see Christ. Read it and let God's Word do its work.

What if you're **not sure if you know God**. How can you benefit from the Word? The Word will make it clear for you. Remember It's able to accurately judge the heart. If you have examined yourself to be sure of salvation and you don't know for sure, then turn to God's word. Read it. Maybe start with 1John and read all the tests of faith and let God's word do its work in you.

What **If you ARE sure that you know God**? Then His Word will sanctify you. It will give you the enduring faith we see in Hebrews. It will comfort and encourage but it will also convict, it will pierce, it will expose and lay bare.

We tend to hide sin; we like to cover it and minimize it or even ignore it. Here we see that the Word helps believers see the sin we hide and the sin we miss so that we may turn from it.

And verses 14-15 which we will officially cover next time are our hope and comfort as they describe the way Jesus sympathizes with us in our weakness and knows exactly what we are going through. He has made it possible for us to come to God's throne of grace boldly so that we may find grace to help in time of need and this gives us endurance. Our superior Savior has made a way for all things that we need for life and godliness. So turn to God's Word. And turn to Christ.

To close today let's consider (4) application and there are a lot of things that we can take away from this chapter, but the one I want to focus on with you is to **REST IN CHRIST**.

And do it (a)Today!!! As verse 7 says, "*Today if you hear His voice do Not harden your hearts.*" We put off a lot of things—we put off exercising because we are exhausted or it's too cold or we have something more pressing; we put off an oil change because we can squeeze in a few more miles and it will probably be fine; we put off cleaning because no one is coming over so it doesn't matter... Do not put this off. This isn't an oil change or exercising or cleaning. This is about eternity. This is your entire future. And none of us knows the number of our days.

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This is one reason why the author of Hebrews uses the OT passage with the word “Today.” It was for them, and it is for us.

**So obey God’s call in faith.** And then **enter His rest.** Rest yourself in Christ.

If you have already rested in Christ then as (b)believers, hold fast your confidence (3:6b). **Walk in obedience** to God’s word and truly rest in Christ. Submit to God’s Word. Humbly read it. Let it pierce your heart and obey it.

Let’s pray,

God thank You so much for Your word. Lord, it’s powerful to be exposed and laid bare by Your Word, but that’s just what we need. Give us the willingness to read Your Word and be changed by it. Give us a holy fear, as we talked about today, to be sure that we are truly Yours; that we enter Your rest. Thank You that You have not left us to ourselves and that You have made it possible for us to live in fellowship with You. Please give us hearts that believe and persevere in faith.

We ask all this in Jesus’ name, Amen