

## Hebrews Pt 6 The Word That Gives Us Rest

---

Isaiah Wilson / General Adult

Hebrews / Hebrews 4:1–13

---

### Hebrews 4:1–13 ESV

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. <sup>2</sup> For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” <sup>5</sup> And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” <sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. <sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, <sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

# I. The Promise We Keep Missing (vv. 1-2)

## Hebrews 4:1-2 ESV

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. <sup>2</sup> For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

Here's something that will mess with your head a little bit. The writer of Hebrews says there's still a promise on the table. God's rest. It's real, it's available right now, and somehow we can miss it.

Not because God changed His mind. Not because the offer expired. We can miss it the same way you can miss a phone call when your phone is sitting right next to you, but you're distracted by something else.

Let me paint you a picture. You know that friend who always has amazing opportunities? Concert tickets, job openings, vacation invitations. They call you up: "Hey, I've got something incredible for you." And what do you do? You hesitate. You think about your schedule. You wonder if it's too good to be true. You say, "Let me think about it." And by the time you call back, the moment has passed.

The writer of Hebrews is basically saying, "Don't be that person with God."

Here's what's wild about this passage. The Israelites heard the same good news we did. Same God, same promise. The word "good news" here is εὐαγγελίζω (euangelizo). It's the same root we get "gospel" from. They got good news too. A message about God's rest, God's provision, God's invitation to stop striving and start trusting.

But it didn't benefit them. Why? Because they heard it but never mixed it with faith.

Think about it like this. You can have the best recipe in the world, but if you never actually combine the ingredients, you don't get the meal. The Israelites had all the right information. They just never combined it with trust.

And here's the part that should make us pay attention: we can do the same thing.

We can sit in church services, read our Bibles, know all the right answers, and still miss the rest God is offering because we keep the gospel at arm's length. We treat it like information to know rather than an invitation to accept.

But the promise remains. That's what verse 1 says. "While the promise of entering his rest remains." Present tense. Still available. Still open.

So what is this rest we're talking about? The Hebrew word for rest that the Old Testament uses is מְנוּחָה (menuchah). It's not just taking a nap. It's about safety, security, being settled. It's about being in the place where you belong, with the people you belong with, doing what you were made to do.

When God promised the Israelites rest in the Promised Land, He wasn't just talking about a nice piece of real estate. He was talking about a place where they could stop wandering, stop worrying, stop fighting for their survival. A place where they could just be His people.

And here's what Hebrews is getting at: that rest is still available. Not the geographical Promised Land, but the spiritual reality it pointed to. Rest in relationship with God. Rest from trying to earn what's already been given. Rest from the exhausting work of managing your own life.

The question that will drive this whole sermon is this: If the promise is still there, if God is still offering this rest, why do people keep missing it?

And the answer might surprise you.

## II. The Pattern We Keep Repeating (vv. 3-10)

### Hebrews 4:3-10 ESV

<sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” <sup>5</sup> And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” <sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. <sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, <sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Here's the pattern that keeps showing up in human history: God speaks, we hear, we hesitate, we harden, we miss out.

The writer of Hebrews takes us back to one of the most devastating moments in Israel's story. Numbers 13 and 14. The spies have just come back from checking out the Promised Land. Ten of them say, "It's amazing, but we can't do it. The people are too strong, the cities are too fortified. We looked like grasshoppers to them."

Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, say, "Are you kidding me? God promised this to us. Let's go."

And what does the whole nation do? They side with fear over faith. They choose the report of the ten over the promise of God.

So God swears an oath. "As I live, they shall not enter my rest." The entire generation that came out of Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, would die in

the wilderness. They would wander for 40 years until that generation passed away.

But here's what Hebrews wants us to see. This wasn't really about geography. Look at verse 3. The writer quotes Psalm 95, which was written hundreds of years after Joshua actually did lead the next generation into the land. David is still warning people: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

Wait a minute. If Joshua gave them rest, why is David still talking about not hardening hearts? Why is there still a "today" to worry about?

Because the rest God is offering goes deeper than real estate.

The writer makes this incredible connection in verses 4 and 10. He goes all the way back to Genesis 2:2. "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." This rest isn't something God invented for the Israelites. It's something God has been inviting people into since the beginning of the world.

Think about it. God didn't rest because He was tired. God rested because His work was complete. Perfect. Finished. And He invited Adam and Eve to enter that rest with Him.

The word for "sabbath rest" in verse 9 is σαββατισμός (sabbatismos). It only appears here in the New Testament. It's not just about keeping the Sabbath day. It's about entering into God's own rest, the rest He's been enjoying since creation.

Here's what this means practically. God's rest isn't about trying harder. It's about trusting that the work is already done. It's about ceasing from your own works, just like God ceased from His.

But we keep missing it. And we miss it the same way Israel did.

Israel looked at the giants in the land and said, "We have to fight those ourselves." God said, "I'll fight for you." Israel said, "But look how big they are." God said, "Look how big I am."

We do the same thing. God says, "I'll provide for you." We say, "But what about my retirement?" God says, "I'll give you purpose." We say, "But what if I fail?" God says, "I'll never leave you." We say, "But what if people reject me?"

The pattern is always the same. God speaks. We hear. But instead of mixing what we hear with faith, we start calculating. We start managing. We start trying to figure out how to make it work on our own.

And here's the thing about hardening your heart. It doesn't happen all at once. The Greek word σκληρύνω (skleruno) means to make hard or stiff. Like a callus. You don't wake up one morning with a callus. It builds up slowly, a little bit of pressure at a time.

That's what happens when hear Gods voice and we keep saying "maybe later". We don't mean to harden our hearts. We just keep postponing the conversation. We keep putting off the surrender. And slowly, bit by bit, our hearts get a little less sensitive to His voice.

But notice what verse 7 says. "Again he appoints a certain day, 'Today.'" The offer keeps coming back. God keeps giving us new opportunities to respond. Every day is a fresh "today."

The tragedy isn't that God stops speaking. The tragedy is that we stop hearing.

But here's where the passage is heading, and it's going to surprise you. The question we're all asking is: "Okay, so how do I not miss it this time? How do I actually enter this rest?"

And the answer probably isn't what we expect.

### III. The Effort That Isn't Effort (v. 11)

#### **Hebrews 4:11 ESV**

<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Now we get to one of the most beautiful paradoxes in all of Scripture. "Let us strive to enter that rest."

Wait, what? Strive to rest? Work hard to stop working? Make an effort to cease from effort?

This is like saying, "Fight really hard to surrender" or "Try your best to stop trying." It sounds like a contradiction. But it's not. It's the heart of the gospel.

The Greek word for "strive" here is σπουδάσωμεν (spoudasomen). It's not the word for sweating and grinding and wearing yourself out. It comes from σπουδάζω (spoudazo), which means to be eager, to be diligent, to take something seriously.

Picture it like this. Your best friend calls you and says, "I have something amazing I want to give you. Can you come over?" You don't drag your feet to their house. You don't show up three hours late. You're eager. You're intentional. You take the invitation seriously.

That's the kind of "striving" this passage is talking about. Not religious effort, but relational eagerness.

But here's where we always get confused. We read "strive to enter that rest" and we immediately think, "Okay, what do I need to do? What's my part? How do I make this happen?"

And that's exactly the wrong question. That's the question that keeps us from rest.

Think about it this way. If someone offers to carry your heavy backpack for you, the "effort" required isn't lifting weights to get stronger. The effort is letting go of the straps. The hard part isn't doing more. The hard part is doing less.

That's what God is saying to us. The most helpful thing we can do is trust Him to handle what He's promised to handle.

But we hear "strive to enter that rest" and we start grabbing tools. We start making lists. We start trying to engineer our own entry into God's rest.

So what does it actually look like to "strive to enter that rest"?

It looks like taking God's promises seriously instead of taking your fears seriously. It looks like being eager to trust rather than eager to control. It looks like making every effort to stop making every effort.

The warning at the end of verse 11 is crucial: "so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." The Greek word for disobedience here is ἀπειθεία (apeitheia). It's not just breaking rules. It's refusing to be persuaded. It's hearing God's voice and saying, "Thanks, but I've got this."

Israel's disobedience wasn't primarily about moral failure. It was about self-reliance. They heard God say, "I'll give you this land," and they said, "But what if we can't handle the giants?" They heard God say, "I'll provide for you in the wilderness," and they said, "But what if we run out of food?"

Their disobedience was their refusal to let God be God.

And we do the same thing. We hear God say, "I'll work all things together for good," and we say, "But what if this situation doesn't work out?" We hear God say, "I'll never leave you or forsake you," and we say, "But what if I mess up too badly?"

Our disobedience is our insistence on staying in control.

But here's what I want you to see. The passage doesn't end with verse 11. The writer doesn't just say, "Try harder to trust God." He gives us something else.

He tells us how this striving actually works. And it's probably not what we think.

The answer to "How do I enter God's rest?" isn't more effort. It's more honesty. And the tool God uses to get us there is His Word.



## IV. The Word That Does the Work (vv. 12-13)

### Hebrews 4:12-13 ESV

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

Here's where everything changes. Here's the answer to our question: "How do we actually enter God's rest?"

And the answer is: We don't. God's Word does.

Look at verse 12. "For the word of God is living and active." The Greek word for "living" is ζῶν (zon) and "active" is ἐνεργής (energes). That second word is where we get our English word "energy." God's Word isn't sitting passively on a shelf waiting for us to do something with it. God's Word is doing something to us.

This isn't about a book. When the writer of Hebrews talks about "the word of God," he's talking about God's active, speaking voice. Sometimes that comes through Scripture. Sometimes it comes through the living Word, Jesus himself. But always, it's God actively communicating, not dead letters on a page.

There's a massive difference between information and transformation. You can read a cookbook and know everything about how to make bread. But until the ingredients actually get mixed and kneaded and baked, you don't have bread. You just have information about bread.

God's Word doesn't just give us information. It does the mixing and kneading and baking. It's "sharper than any two-edged sword."

Now, we usually think of swords as weapons for fighting other people. But that's not what's happening here. This sword isn't for attacking enemies. It's for surgery. And the surgery is happening on us.

The Word "pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow." In Hebrew thinking, this is getting to the deepest possible level. Joints and marrow are hidden inside your body where you can't see them. Soul and spirit represent the deepest parts of who you are.

God's Word gets to places in us that we can't even access ourselves. It reveals the difference between what we think we want and what we actually need. It exposes the gap between what we say we believe and what we actually believe.

And here's the key connection to the rest we've been talking about. You can't rest while you're hiding. You can't enter God's rest while you're managing your image, protecting your reputation, or pretending you've got it all together.

The Word strips all that away. And that's where rest begins.

Think about it like this. You go to the doctor because something's wrong. The doctor runs tests, takes X-rays, does blood work. All of that reveals what's really going on inside your body. You might not like what you see, but you can't get healthy until you know what you're dealing with.

God's Word does the same thing spiritually. It reveals what's really going on in your heart. And you might not like what you see. But you can't get healthy until you know what you're dealing with.

The Word "discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Greek word for "discerns" is κριτικός (kritikos), where we get our word "critic." But this isn't harsh judgment. This is precise diagnosis. Like a skilled surgeon who can see exactly what needs to be removed and what needs to be healed.

And then verse 13 takes it even further. "No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

That word "exposed" is τετραχελισμένα (tetrachelismena). It's a wrestling term. Picture a wrestler who has been completely overpowered, neck bent back, totally vulnerable. No defense left. No way to hide.

That sounds terrifying. And it would be, if this passage ended here. Complete exposure before a holy God? That's the stuff of nightmares.

But here's what changes everything. This isn't the end of the story. The writer is setting us up for what comes next in verse 14. We have a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. The God who sees everything is the same God who loves us completely.

The Word that exposes us is the same Word that saves us.

And this is how we enter rest. Not by working harder to hide our problems, but by letting God's Word reveal them so He can heal them. Not by managing our image before God, but by being completely honest about what His Word shows us.

The rest comes when we stop pretending and start trusting. When we stop performing and start receiving. When we let God's Word do its work in us instead of trying to do the work ourselves.

Here's what I think is happening in this passage. We read verse 11 and think, "Okay, what do I need to do to enter God's rest?" But verses 12-13 flip the script completely. The effort isn't about us working harder. It's about letting God's Word work on us.

The Word that reveals our need is the Word that meets our need. The surgery that exposes the problem is the surgery that fixes the problem.

## V. The Rest That Is So Much Better

Here's what we've discovered in [Hebrews 4](#). There's a rest available that goes deeper than anything Joshua could provide. There's a Word at work that does

what no human effort can accomplish. And there's a Person at the center of it all who is so much better than we think He is.

This is the heart of our series. Jesus is better. But better than what?

Joshua was pretty amazing. He led Israel across the Jordan River. He conquered Jericho. He divided up the Promised Land among the twelve tribes. Joshua 21:44 says, "And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands."

That's impressive. Joshua gave them rest from their enemies. Rest from wandering. Rest from uncertainty about where they belonged.

But Hebrews 4:8 says something stunning: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on."

Joshua's rest wasn't enough. It was good, but it wasn't ultimate. It was temporary, it wasn't eternal. It dealt with external enemies, but it couldn't touch the internal ones.

Joshua could give them a place to live, but he couldn't give them peace in their hearts. He could defeat the Canaanites, but he couldn't defeat Israel's unbelief. He could establish borders, but he couldn't establish their identity as God's people.

Jesus gives us all of that and more.

Joshua led them into a physical land. Jesus leads us into relationship with the Father. Joshua gave them rest from external warfare. Jesus gives us rest from internal striving. Joshua conquered their enemies. Jesus conquered sin, death, and hell itself.

But here's what makes Jesus so much better. Joshua's rest required them to keep fighting to maintain it. Every generation had to defend the land, establish their borders, prove their strength. It was rest that could be lost.

Jesus gives us rest that can never be taken away. Why? Because it's not based on our performance. It's based on His.

When Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, He wasn't just talking about His life ending. He was talking about the work ending. The work of earning our acceptance with God. The work of proving our worth. The work of managing our relationship with the Father.

That work is done. Complete. Finished.

And now He invites us into the rest He purchased. Not the rest of inactivity, but the rest of identity. Not the rest of laziness, but the rest of love. Not the rest of doing nothing, but the rest of knowing who we are.

Joshua's rest was about what they could accomplish. Jesus' rest is about what He already accomplished.

Joshua's rest was about a place on a map. Jesus' rest is about a place in God's heart.

Joshua's rest was about physical safety. Jesus' rest is about spiritual security.

And here's how we enter this better rest. Not by trying harder, but by trusting deeper. Not by working more, but by believing more. Not by doing something for God, but by letting God's Word do something in us.

The same Word that reveals our need is the Word that meets our need. The same God who sees everything about us is the God who loves us. The same Jesus who knows our failures is the Jesus who washes away our failures.

So what does this look like practically?

When you're lying awake at night worried about tomorrow, remember that Jesus' rest doesn't depend on your ability to control tomorrow. When you're beating yourself up over yesterday's mistakes, remember that Jesus' rest doesn't depend on your perfect track record. When you're exhausted from trying

to earn God's approval, remember that Jesus' rest is based on approval you already have.

The effort God calls us to isn't the effort of earning. It's the effort of receiving. It's the daily choice to let God's Word show us who we really are and who He really is.

Joshua was a great leader. But Jesus is a better Savior.

Joshua won battles. But Jesus won the war.

Joshua gave them rest in a land. But Jesus gives us rest in a relationship.

And that rest is available today. Not someday when you get your act together. Not next week when your circumstances improve. Not next year when you finally figure it out.

Today. If you hear His voice, don't harden your heart.

The promise remains. The Word is active. And Jesus is so much better than anything we could ask or imagine.