

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #7

Hebrews 4:1-11

When we come to **Hebrews 4:1**, we come to a text that challenges us to have “fear” of something. The word “fear” is the Greek verb (φοβέω) from which we get our English word “phobia.” **This word means to be so afraid of something that you flee from it.** The particular fear that God wants us to have here in Hebrews is a fear that would fall short of entering God’s rest. It is very clear that the possibility does exist for a Christian not entering this rest spot. As Joseph Dillow said, “There is real danger, not hypothetical danger here ...” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 216).

God wants us to make a point of time decision to permit a specific fear to dominate our lives, and the fear is that we not receive full reward and full kingdom benefits and access when Jesus Christ reigns. God wants us fleeing from that which could prevent us from entering the final and fully rewarded state. **Now the specific rest that is being referred to here is not heaven; it is the place, honor, and blessing, and reward that the believer can have and should have when Christ is here on earth reigning as Righteous King.**

Joseph Dillow writes: “Does the writer of this epistle doubt their salvation? No! What he worries about is their loss of reward” (*Ibid.*, p. 217). As Hebrews 10:35 says, “Do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward.”

The main point the writer is communicating here in chapter 4 is this:

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE FEARFUL OF DISOBEYING GOD’S WORD TO THE POINT THAT THEY DO NOT END UP WITH THE HONOR AND REWARDS THEY SHOULD HAVE HAD.

God wants His people afraid. What He specifically wants them afraid of is fleshly, sinful things that could end up costing them big-time when Jesus Christ reigns. If you are beginning to feel this and sense this, then this book is doing exactly what it is supposed to do.

We may observe that two times in these verses the word “disobedience” (απειθειας) (**4:6, 11**) is used. The word refers to disobeying God’s Word, which is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.

God will convict His people through His Word, and He wants them to respond to this conviction; and if they don’t, they can end up costing themselves many blessings and rewards when they arrive at their final rest in eternity.

God wants us living with a healthy fear that consistently remembers the fact that I could finish the Christian life as a loser and not a winner. **The specific threat in this text is that we could miss the opportunity to enter the final honored resting place. If we don’t stay away from things sinful, we could cost ourselves a great eternal inheritance.** God wants us continually thinking this way and living this way.

Now as we look down through this text we may notice that there are a series of four warning explanations to this important theme. **God explains why He wants His people to be very fearful and very careful as to how they respond to God's Word:**

WARNING EXPLANATION #1 – It is possible to hear the Word of God and not profit by the Word of God. **4:2**

The writer of Hebrews says it is possible to hear the Word of God preached and not be united to it by faith. The verb “united” (συνκεραννυμι) is one that means to be mixed or blended together or to be compounded with something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 430).

The verb is perfect tense which means at the point of time when God's Word is preached, there needs to be a blending together of what one hears with what one believes and how one behaves. One needs to continually apply the Word from the moment he hears it and God convicts him of it. He needs to apply it in the present and the future. The point here is that it is possible to hear the Word of God and not blend it into our faith into our life? If ever there is proof of this it is Israel.

The problem for Israel is that she heard the Word but there was no value to it because she did not by faith implement it into her life. The people of Israel would go to amazing services that featured the visible presence of God. They would hear the Word of God preached by prophets who had received it directly from God. **The problem for Israel was not a problem of not hearing, it was a problem of not believing and not applying.** They never allowed God's Word to be blended into their lives by faith.

The warning to the Grace Age believer is don't ever let that happen to you. We need to hear God's Word and immediately blend it into our faith.

WARNING EXPLANATION #2 – It is possible to believe and not enter into God's rest . because of disobedience. **4:3-6**

Carefully observe that two times in these verses God warns “they shall not enter MY rest” (4:3, 5). **Now the rest being referred to here is not heaven . The moment one believes . on Jesus Christ, one is guaranteed heaven (Romans 8:1, 31-39).**

What one is not guaranteed is an abundant entrance into heaven (II Peter 1:11) that receives full reward (II John 8). It is possible for a believer to enter eternity, having thrown away the honor and rewards one could have received so that the final fullness of the rest place has been missed forever.

Now in **verses 3-6** the writer again uses Israel as an example. Joseph Dillow observes: “Now entering the rest place for Israel was more than just obtaining some real estate; it had a spiritual dimension as well. It involved the completion of their work, a finishing of their God-appointed task to take possession of the land. For that generation, that was their purpose and destiny. ... **It is impossible to enter into rest without entering the land, but it was possible to enter the land and not enter rest**” (*The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 101).

The fact is, the Exodus generation was a believing generation who saw God do some amazing things, but they did not end up with the inheritance they should have had, and that fear was on the heart and mind of God concerning believers in Hebrews.

There are three key points the writer wants to make to N.T. believers:

Point #1 - A consistent continual faith that applies the Word of God is necessary for entrance into the full and final rest. **4:3**

The tense of the participle “believe” (present tense) indicates the writer is not speaking of the moment one comes to faith in Jesus Christ, but the persistent Christian life one needs for full reward.

When God was dealing with Israel, He had already saved them from Egypt; but because they did not continue to trust Him and obey Him, He was so angry that He swore that He would not let that group enter that land, even though this had been the plan since before the foundation of the world.

God’s plan for the N.T. believer is not that they just go to heaven by the skin of their teeth, but that they enter heaven highly honored and fully rewarded. That is God’s plan and there must be a continual application of God’s Word if one is to make this happen.

Point #2 - A consistent continual faith that completes the plan of God is necessary to enter the full and final rest. **4:4-5**

The point of this is that God rested after He had completed the work and plan, which for Him was creation. He did not stop halfway through the project. He finished His course.

That is exactly what God is demanding here of believers. Finish your course faithful to Me or else, He says, you “shall not enter My rest.”

Over and over again believers are challenged to finish the race, to press on, to complete the course. The grace of God gives us many opportunities to repent and refocus on the eternal finish line.

Point #3 - It is possible to enter the full and final rest place or not enter it, and the key factor is disobedience to the Word of God. **4:6**

God wants His people living with a constant fear that they could forfeit eternal honor and eternal rewards through disobedience .

The determining factor for all of us in regard to whether or not we finish a winner will be whether or not we obeyed the Scriptures. When the Scriptures are opened the Holy Spirit will convict, and if we respond to the conviction, we put ourselves on a course of rewards. But if we fail to respond and persist in disobedience, we can forfeit our inheritance. Jesus Christ will be stationed in Jerusalem, specifically at the Temple, and that is where we will want to be.

WARNING EXPLANATION #3 – It is possible to harden your heart on a specific day that God convicts you and forfeit your honor and rewards. **4:7**

The verb “do not harden” (σκληρυνω) is one that means to stubbornly harden your heart (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 409). This is just the opposite of being tenderhearted to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The subjunctive mood is used because the outcome is uncertain. The potential to harden a heart as a believer is very real. It is possible for any believer to hear God’s Word and be convicted and to harden his or her heart at that very moment and not respond.

God may convict you on a certain day, and the day He convicts you is the day you need to respond. He may not convict you for a long time, but then all of a sudden He brings you under conviction and He expects you to respond.

One might ask, How do you hear the voice of God? Through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit that comes in harmony with the Word of God.

What every believer needs to realize is that this is a very dangerous thing to do because this was the kind of thing Israel did, which made God angry to the point that He would not let them enter the Promised Land.

WARNING EXPLANATION #4 – There is a final rest which features the full benefits and rewards of God that is possible to miss through disobedience . **4:8-11**

According to **verse 8**, when Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, many thought they had entered into the fullness of the rest of God. The writer says that is not true. If this had been true, God would have never spoken of another rest day, free from any hostility. Had this been the final rest place, there would have been total peace and righteousness. But God spoke of “another” day, “another” rest.

When Joshua took Israel into the land, it did not lead Israel into a permanent possession of permanent peace, which still is the expectation of Israel. Why didn’t she get that at that time? Why didn’t Israel have a kingdom rest of total righteousness and peace? Because of her disobedience.

As **verse 10** says, when Israel would reach this kingdom, she would rest from all work, just as God rested at the end of His creation. In other words, when Israel would be in the full and final resting place God intended, she would have no threats and her land would flourish and blossom as a Garden of God. **In order to get into this rest place, one must do the work and be faithful until the end.**

Now **verse 11** applies this to us. It is true that anyone who believes on Jesus Christ ceases from depending on his own works and trusts in the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is not possible to fall from that rest position.

However, there is another rest one may enter, a final Sabbath rest for the people of God. This will be the ultimate moment when Jesus Christ reigns on this earth. This will be the day when righteousness and peace reign on this earth and it is possible to fall away from this rest.

The word “fall” means to fall down from a lofty position (Smith, p. 361). The aorist tense indicates that there is a point of time if you persistently harden your heart that you can lose your lofty position and status. You can lose your rewards. Be diligent to guard yourself until the end of your life so you do not lose this reward.

The writer says make haste, be zealous and be eager and diligent with great speed to see to it that you do not fall.

If you are a believer here tonight and you know you have not been responding to the conviction of God, then make haste to flee to God and confess your sin. Confess your hard-heartedness and ask God to give you His grace so that you will finish a winner.