

God's Rest

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • PART 7 • Hebrews 3:7-4:11

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It is good to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakeschurch.org/visitor. And if you are here with us in person today, we hope you can join us downstairs as we eat together after worship this morning. We've asked Aaron to make sure to thank God for the good food as we end our worship together, and then we will head downstairs and jump right into it. You are invited to join us.

We are here this morning to worship God and to preach the good news that Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We obey that good news by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and by obeying his command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. And we do have several examples this morning, starting with an update from the Lord's church in Dickenson, North Dakota. They say, "The joy of watching someone start their new life in Christ! Congrats Ricardo." Amen to that!

We also have an awesome update from the church in Lindale, Texas. They say,

Cool Gospel Story. Last year one of our members, Melinda, invited a sweet young lady to church who worked at a local restaurant. Our sister studied with her at her house and Taylor became a Christian. Taylor's brought so many people to church! Recently she invited her husband's boss and his wife to visit services. One of our elders jumped on that and got a weekly studies going. Soon after, Marco became a new brother in Christ. Tonight, after their weekly study with Ben, Marco baptized his wife Kaitlin into Christ! What a wonderful moment! It's a family effort. Invites. Studies. Baptisms. The horizon is bright for the Gospel in our time. All hands on deck! To God be the glory, great things He is doing!

I almost lost track of all of the connections in that story, but that is definitely how it works, and we are thrilled that Marco (a new Christian himself) had the opportunity to baptize his wife a week or so ago.

Just a quick update from the Fort Street Church of Christ in Omaha, Nebraska. I know we've noted interesting baptisteries over the past three years, and this is something I haven't seen before. They congratulate their new brother in Christ, Billy Aglar. But I was keeping an eye on the mirror over their baptistery. I had never seen that, so I thought I would share this one today. There were many others this week...

..but I thought we should close with one from right here in Wisconsin, from the Maple Street congregation up in Waupaca. They start by quoting Romans 6,

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” The hosts of Heaven and God's family welcomes brother Mike to the kingdom! A new creation in Christ. We praise His holy Name!

Again, we have many others, but we share these pictures by way of encouragement, and if we can help with your obedience to the gospel, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning, we return to our series of lessons on Hebrews by getting back to our study of REST. How interesting, on the day we lose an hour of sleep, we continue our study of rest! Last week, we noted that the author of Hebrews makes a comparison between the rest promised to God's people in the Promised Land and the rest promised to us today. And we noted that just as they fell short and missed it, so also we can miss it. Last week, then, we looked at several warnings, focusing in on two of those. He warns us about the danger of hardened hearts, and he also warns us about the danger of unbelief. This week, I want us to go back to the same passage, but this week, let's focus on the positive. So, not only are there some dangers to avoid (so that we don't miss the rest that's been promised by God), but there are also some things we need to be doing.

Let's think about God's rest this morning by looking together (once again) at Hebrews 3:7 – 4:11,

⁷ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, ⁹ WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. ¹⁰ “THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’; ¹¹ AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’”

¹² Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, ¹⁵ while it is said, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME.” ¹⁶ For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest, just 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. ⁴ For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: **“AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS”;** ⁵ and again in this passage, **“THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.”**

⁶ Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ He again fixes a certain day, **“Today,”** saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, **“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”** ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. ⁹ So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ¹¹ Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

So, once again today, we have a parallel between the Israelites being delivered from slavery in Egypt many years ago and us being freed from our sin today – just as they looked forward to a rest, so we also look forward to a rest. And just as they missed it, so also we can miss our rest today. Last week, we had the dangers to avoid, and this week we have several positive commands. This is what we can actually do so that we make it to this rest that’s been promised to us.

- I. And I’d like to start where the author of Hebrews starts in this passage, with the reminder that we must **LISTEN TO GOD’S VOICE.**

He starts out (in verse 7), with that quote from Psalm 95, **“TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE.”** He continues with the warning we looked at last week, where he says, **“DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS.”** But I want us to focus in on this idea of hearing God’s voice. Today, some people in the religious world have this idea that God speaks to them directly, and they have the idea that what God says to them might be different from what God says to everybody else. Years ago, you might remember a major denomination sponsored a series of billboards, featuring the message, “God is still speaking,” and many of these featured a comma, the idea that the Bible doesn’t end with a period, but it ends with a comma, the idea that God is still speaking. And that opens up the idea that God may say something to you today that is quite different from what he said in his word. God, though, is not a God of confusion. We need to go back to the opening line of this book, where the author says that, **“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.”** In other words, in ancient times, God spoke through dreams, and visions, and donkeys, and burning bushes, and angels, and so on. But today, God speaks through his Son, and the Son’s message is consistent, because his voice is preserved in the written word. In John 12:48, Jesus himself said, **“He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”** This is why John starts his gospel account with the reminder, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** Jesus is the word of God, and he speaks to us not in dreams, not through angels, but through the written word. Our job, then, is to listen, to hear and obey, and we do this **“today”** – not putting it off until tomorrow, or next week, or a year from now, but **“today.”** The author of Hebrews knows how easy it is to put things off. Years ago, when I was still preaching in Janesville, I remember getting a call from a member here at Four Lakes, and he was preaching the next morning. This is late on a Saturday night, and he’s calling for help with his sermon. I asked, “What are you preaching on?” And his topic was “procrastination”! But it’s easy to put things off, so the author of Hebrews repeats this twice, **“today,”** (not just in verse 7), but also in verse 15: We are to listen to God’s voice **“today.”** God speaks to us today through scripture. Sometimes we sing about those “ancient words, long preserved, for our walk, in this

world.” These words were written for our benefit, today, so that we do not miss the rest that God has promised. We apply this to our lives today by spending time in the written word – listening to it, reading it, and teaching it.

II. There are a number of other positive commands in this passage – we could study these for the next several hours – but I’d like for us to focus in on one of these for the rest of our time together today, and that is: If we want to enter God’s rest, we need to ENCOURAGE each other.

And just like listening to God’s voice, this also is something that we must do not just “today,” but “day after day.” Let’s focus in on Hebrews 3:13, where the author says, ***“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*** If we remember anything from this passage, if anything makes it out of this building today, I hope it’s this, that making it to God’s rest is a group project. This happens together or it doesn’t happen at all. Our faith depends on it. Our faith depends on ***“encouraging one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today.’”*** Now, I realize that our culture has trained us to stay out of each other’s business, but God has something else in mind. Scripture teaches that we must ***“encourage one another.”*** I know we’ve studied this over and over again, but the word “encourage” in this passage goes back to a word that refers to calling somebody to your side. There are times when I need a Christian brother or sister to be so concerned about me that they step up beside me and put their arm around my shoulder and tell me what I need to hear – not necessarily what I WANT to hear, but what I NEED to hear. And notice the reason for this encouragement, ***“so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*** Is sin deceitful? Absolutely! This world has a way of getting us all turned around, even to the point where even the strongest among us need some encouragement; we need somebody to call us to their side. That’s what this word means. Maybe it’s a word of correction; maybe it’s a word of thanks; maybe it’s a word of praise; or maybe it’s just a reminder that we’ve been in somebody’s prayers this week. All of us need this from time to time. But you know what? We also need to be doing this for others. How often? ***“Day after day.”*** For how long? ***“...as long as it is still called ‘Today.’”*** Why? ***“So that none of us will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*** Can you think of a Christian brother or sister you haven’t seen for a while? What might you personally be able to do to encourage that person? Do you have a face in mind? If you can think of somebody who might need some encouragement, let me ask: When might be a good time to do that? Today? This doesn’t mean talking about this person, this means me personally calling this person to my side and encouraging. And we do this so that neither of us is ***“hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”***

This is why it’s so important to spend time together. We come together, not just to say we’ve been in the same building together for an hour or so, but to encourage. We come together, not just to eat together, but to encourage. And we will get to this when we get to Hebrews 10 at some point, but it’s absolutely possible to faithfully come together on the first day of every week and to NOT do what we’ve been commanded to do. The command is to ***“encourage,”*** and if we come together and fail to encourage, then we have failed to accomplish one of the main objectives in coming together. So, let’s use our time together to encourage. As we eat together today, maybe we could find someone and ask, “Is there anything I need to be praying about in your life this week?” And then we write it down, and we pray, and we follow up next week by asking how it’s going. Or maybe we ask, “What went well in your life spiritually this week?” Or maybe we just check in and pay attention. But we ***“encourage,”*** and when we do, we help each other make it to the rest that God has promised to us.

Conclusion:

This morning, we've seen the comparison: Just as the Israelites missed out on God's rest, so also we can miss out on the rest that's still coming. Last week we looked at the negative, but today we've looked at the positive. First of all, we enter God's rest by listening to his voice TODAY. We don't put it off, but we listen to his voice TODAY, and secondly, we enter God's rest by encouraging one another day after day, as long as it is still called *"today."*

I know that some of you here this morning are tired, that you are feeling completely drained by the world. Some of you here this morning have carried some incredibly heavy burdens for a long, long time. And for those who may be wondering how long you can hold on, I would simply offer the encouragement that we do not need to hold on forever. Rest is coming. But until we get there, let's not give up. It'll be worth it in the end. Here in this life, we've been forgiven; in that sense, the real weight has been lifted, but we haven't quite made it to our final rest, and we need to hang on a bit longer. We do that by listening to God's voice today and by encouraging one another day after day. As the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 4:9, *"...there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."*

John has chosen a song to prepare our hearts and minds for the Lord's Supper, but before we sing, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only great and awesome God, creator of heaven and earth, the God who spoke to Adam, and Abraham, and Moses. You have revealed your love to us in Scripture, and you have told us how to respond to it. We pray, Father, that we would accept your word with open hearts, that we would listen, and that we would allow your word to sprout, and take root, and grow.

Today, we pray for wisdom as we encourage each other. We ask for tender hearts, and we ask for eyes to see those around us who may be struggling, or lonely, or hurting. We pray for the power to lift each other up so that we can one day be together in the rest you have promised.

We come to you through Jesus, our Savior and Lord. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com