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Sermon Notes

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Enter God's Rest Through Faith

Hebrews 4:1-5

Our distracted, fractured, turbulent world is desperate for some REST!!!

Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³ All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

Over 172 million Americans suffer from sleep disorders... insomnia; since 9/11/01, the sale of sleeping pills has increased 25%

People are disturbed and restless... like the churning waves of the sea... unable to sleep because of their labors and anxieties... struggling with fears about the future: what will happen tomorrow? What if my husband dies? What if the stock market crashes? What if I lose my job?

Even worse are the restless anxieties that go to the center of their souls... people's guilty consciences tormenting them with their sins... Satan accusing... Judgment Day looming... people play tricks with their minds and think perhaps there is no heaven, no hell, no accounting, no day of reckoning before a holy God... but in their minds, there is the nagging suspicion that God is angry with them because of their sins

So, they lie awake at night...plotting, scheming, reasoning, planning, worrying, waiting for sleep to come

Not so, the righteous!!! King David spoke for the entire family of God when he described how easy it was for him to rest, to fall asleep at night

Psalm 3:5-6 I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. ⁶ I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.

Psalm 4:8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

And why? Because by faith he knew that God was at peace with him

How much more dramatic is the confidence of the Apostle Paul when facing his own death completely unafraid, knowing that the blood of Jesus Christ had paid for all His sins

2 Timothy 4:7-8 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Dear friend, have you entered God's rest through faith in Christ? And are you experiencing the fullness of that rest right now by faith? That's what this sermon is all about.

Summary: The Book of Hebrews was written to first century Jewish people who had made a profession of faith in Christ. But these people were under intense pressure from their neighbors, from government officials, from the world around them to give up their profession of faith in Christ and go back to Old Covenant Judaism. So the author writes a strong word of warning to them to continue in their profession of faith in Christ... to finish the journey of faith they began. He doesn't want them to drift away, turn away, or fall away from Christ. In Hebrews 3:15-19, he gives them the plain example of the Jewish nation in the time of the Exodus who came to the brink of the Promised Land and refused to enter because of unbelief.

Hebrews 3:19 *“So we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief.”*

Now as we look at Hebrews 4:1-5, the author renews his persuasion...

He is going to meditate for a while on what it means to enter God's rest. The clear idea is that coming to faith in Christ = entering God's rest... and the ultimate consummation of that is entering God's heavenly rest through faith in Christ. But the world is going to fight you entering God's rest every step of the way.

In effect he is going to say “It is not enough to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ... you have to combine it with faith. And the true faith in Christ that God gives will survive any test that this world can dish out.”

There is a healthy FEAR in this passage... a fear of coming short of God's heavenly rest in Christ. That is what we are talking about

I. The Promise of God's Rest Still Stands

Hebrews 4:1 *“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands...”*

A. What Is God's Rest?

1. Answer #1: God's personal quality

a. God is perfectly at rest and at peace within Himself

b. He is not troubled or tossed about by doubts or fears or concerns or second thoughts

c. God is a peaceful being, and nothing can trouble His rest

2. Answer #2: God's perfected labors

Vs. 3-4 And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work."

The idea is one of a set of labors being perfected, completed, accomplished

God's initial work of creation was perfect as God made it...

But the author makes it plain that that could not be the final resting place of humanity... redemptive history had to follow, leading to a final, perfected resting place

From the very beginning of the world, after the sixth day of creation, God declared the universe PERFECT

Genesis 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-- the sixth day.

Then Genesis 2 declares God's final act of creation: the Sabbath rest

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

God's physical work was all COMPLETE and PERFECT at that point

So the author speaks of the rest of God at that point...

Vs. 3-5 Now 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 work has been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

The words "and yet" show the contrast between a rest that God entered so long ago, and the rest that He holds out to us NOW, today

God finished His work then in that it was PERFECT for what He wanted to achieve

Thus there was no more for Him to do at that point, and He sat down in completion over it

In the same way, the heavenly rest God offers us is a cessation from all our works in this world to rest with God in perfection

3. Answer #3: God's perfect dwelling place... where His people are no longer troubled or tormented

Psalm 132:13-16 For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: ¹⁴ "This is my resting place forever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it-- ¹⁵ I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food. ¹⁶ I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy.

- a. Think of a place of security and full provision

Psalm 23:1-3 The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul.

Note: "quiet waters" = waters that have come to their resting place... not turbulent, not churning, not frothing and enraged... but quiet, at rest... God makes us lie down in a place of rest, a place of ease and provision

- b. A place where there are no enemies that can threaten us

Joshua 21:44 The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them.

- c. Heaven is the true final place of rest

B. What Does It Mean to Enter God's Rest?

1. The Context of Hebrews 3-4: The Promised Land

- a. For the Jews... it meant entering the Promised Land... the Land God had promised to give to Abraham and his descendants forever
- b. He then reiterated this promise to the Jews through Moses
- c. The Jews at that time were crushed with the yoke of slavery... having to make bricks without straw to satisfy their cruel taskmasters
- d. The Promised Land would be a place where they would dwell in peace and be no one's slaves... a place of rest

Deuteronomy 26:6-9 the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey

- e. The Promised Land was seen to be an end to the restless wandering of the people of God
- f. Again and again, the Lord spoke of the Promised Land as the place of their rest and His... the wanderings in the desert would only come to an end when God and His people were at REST in the Promised Land

Numbers 10:33-36 So they set out from the mountain of the LORD and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. ³⁴ The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp. ³⁵ Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you." ³⁶ Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel."

The Ark of the Covenant represented God's presence with His wandering people; the dwelling place for the Ark was a moveable TENT... the tabernacle; the pillar of cloud and fire moved out and led the people in their wandering ways, for they had not yet come to their place of rest

When they conquered the Promised Land, the symbolic rest was nearer.

When Solomon finally built the temple, he prayed for the Lord to come to rest at last in the resting place, the Temple of Jerusalem

2 Chronicles 6:41 "Now arise, O LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might."

- g. However, the Promised Land and the Temple were merely **SHADOWS AND TYPES** of the true rest
- h. The author will make it plain in the next passage that Joshua did not really give the Israelites the true rest God had in mind... we'll discuss this more next time

The Promised Land was a SHADOW of the reality... the reality is:

2. Heavenly rest

- a. The true rest that God gives in heaven must be eternity in heaven... resting in God's very presence, with a resurrected soul in a resurrected body, surrounded by other resurrected people in a resurrected world
- b. Heaven is thus portrayed as a place of perfect rest, perfect peace, absent from all the striving and turmoil and suffering brought on by the Satanic rebellion against God's throne
- c. The essence of our heavenly rest is ...

3. Salvation in Christ

***Matthew 11:28-30* Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."**

Coming to salvation in Christ is like entering the Promised Land... you will find REST for your souls

C. What is the Promise of Entering God's Rest?

1. A promise is a statement made by God ahead of time of some blessing He will give the people
2. God made the Jews a promise concerning the Land of Canaan, that He would give it to them to be their possession
3. But the author is going deeper here in Hebrews 4... He is looking beyond the Promised Land... the time for that is OVER... He is going to the true REST God promises... rest from the war of sin and from all its terrible effects
4. The GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST is the promise of entering God's rest

D. How Does that Promise Still Stand for Us Today?

1. The Gospel stands over the wrecks of time in EVERY GENERATION, God's promise to anyone who trusts in Christ that they will find rest for their souls
2. The Gospel's message is simple:
 - a. God is a holy, awesome, powerful King who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that lives in it, the earth and all that moves upon it;
 - b. God created man in His image to love and serve Him; but man chose to rebel against the laws of God and sinned... so we are born and live every day under the death penalty; God at war with us, and we at war with Him; the death penalty is what we deserve for our sins
 - c. God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world as a man; He lived a sinless life under the Laws of God; He died an atoning death for our sins on the cross; God the Father raised Him from the dead on the third day, proving that the atonement on the cross was acceptable to Him
 - d. Now God commands all people everywhere to repent from sin and trust in Christ; if we do, the Promise stands: full forgiveness for sins and PEACE

WITH GOD, a place with God forever in the true place of REST: heaven itself

e. In that way, the Promise of entering God's rest still stands

E. What Should We Do About It?

1. Positively: we should BELIEVE that promise by trusting in Christ for the rest of our lives
2. Negatively: we should not be UNBELIEVERS, rebels who turn away from the Promise of rest that God is giving us

II. Fear Falling Short... Yourself, or Any of Us

Hebrews 4:1 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.

A. "Therefore...": Looking Back to Israel's Failure

1. The author sums up the history lesson plainly:

Hebrews 3:19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

2. He is now exhorting the Jews under the hearing of the gospel not to make the same wicked error their ancestors had made... through UNBELIEF to refuse to enter the true promised land of salvation through faith in Christ resulting in an eternity of happiness in heaven

B. Be Afraid... Be Very Afraid!

1. Because the same Promise of entering His rest still stands, LET US FEAR... that is literally what the text says

^{ESV} Hebrews 4:1 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.

2. The fear is plain: fear failing to reach the Promised Land... having heard the gospel, to not end up trusting in Christ and entering heaven... FEAR that any of us should APPEAR to have fallen short of it
3. To FALL SHORT of the heavenly goal, the heavenly Promised Land means to fail to persevere in the Christian life
4. The whole point of this passage, and indeed of the whole Book of Hebrews is to PRESS UPON CHRISTIANS the absolute need to PERSEVERE in the Christian faith... to KEEP TRUSTING Jesus right through to the end... to run the race with endurance until you cross the FINISH LINE

5. FEAR lest you not finish what you began

In 1980, the men's Olympic hockey team shocked the world by beating the Russians 4-3, unleashing the wildest on-ice celebration America had ever seen. The release of joy and relief and energy was immense... the problem was, there was still one more game to play

The fact is, the team hadn't actually won any medal yet... they had to beat Finland to win the gold medal; if they lost that game, they might actually end up in fourth place

The coach of that team, Herb Brooks, was a master motivator... before the third and final period of the Finland game, with the team losing 2-1, he put before them a single fear...

He said to his quiet team... "If you lose this game, you will take it to your graves!!!" He left the locker room, paused, came back and said the same thing again with language we can't repeat: "TO YOUR GRAVES!"

He was putting a single fear in them... the fear of NOT FINISHING WHAT THEY STARTED TO DO

The author to the Hebrews is doing the same thing here... pleading with the Christian church to FINISH what they started... he is motivating them with FEAR based on the sad history of the Jews, who started out of Egypt and made it as far as the Jordan River, but who through unbelief NEVER ENTERED the Promised Land

FEAR THAT, O Church!! FEAR it!!!

"Let us fear lest any of you should seem to have fallen short of it."

C. Fear for Yourself First

1. Look after your own soul... your own heart of faith in Christ
2. Is your faith in Jesus as strong as it was a year ago? As strong as it was when you first trusted in Christ?
3. FEAR lest you who have had the gospel preached to you should in the end FAIL to enter heaven
4. DON'T MISUNDERSTAND: you can't lose your salvation!!! If you have a genuine faith in Christ, you will be strengthened in that faith daily until you die... but these warnings are an essential part of your faith diet

D. Fear for the Church Second

1. The author isn't just concerned with the individual Christian...
2. He is a pastor who is concerned for the WHOLE CHURCH

3. Again, he wants these Hebrew Christians to “watch over one another in brotherly love”... to care if ANY OF THEM are drifting away from Christ
4. The language extends throughout the whole church:

Hebrews 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest ANY of you be found to have fallen short of it.

5. The Lord doesn't want to lost ANY of His sheep... and we are called on to be sure NO ONE is drifting away from Christ

III. The Gospel Promise is Worthless Unless Combined with Faith

Again... the author is looking backward in time to that first generation of Jews during the Exodus who refused to believe God and enter the Promised Land...

Hebrews 4:2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

- A. Notice the Author Calls What the Jews Heard in the Exodus the GOSPEL... a promise of good things from God
- B. The Promise is Worthless without Faith
 1. It is not enough to HEAR the Good News...
 2. The Jews who left Egypt all heard the promise that God was giving them the Promised Land... they heard its words, they understood the message
 3. BUT they did NOT believe that God would actually be able to achieve the Promise... they felt the Canaanites were too powerful for them to defeat; they heard the promise and it did them no good at all
 4. So also the gospel is USELESS, of NO VALUE if it is not combined with faith
 5. Amazing... the most powerful message in the history of the world is the gospel of Jesus Christ

Romans 1:16 it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes

6. This powerful message literally rescues sinners from hell and transports them to heaven... but it is of NO PROFIT WHATSOEVER without faith

C. The Chemistry of Salvation: Combining Promise with Faith

Vs. 2 ...the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

^{KJV} Hebrews 4:2 ... but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

1. Greek verb literally: “blend”, “unite”, “combine”
2. Like a chemical compound... two different chemicals that have to be mixed together, and if one of them is missing, it is of no value

D. The Burden of the Passage... and the Book: KEEP BELIEVING in CHRIST!!!

IV. Everyone Who Believes Enters God’s Rest

Hebrews 4:3 Now we who have believed enter that rest

A. Clear Assertion: Everyone who Believes Enters God’s Rest

1. Believes what? Believes in Jesus Christ!!!

B. How Should We Enjoy God’s Rest Now?

1. Sin produces the constant restlessness of a guilty conscience, fear of Judgment Day and the wrath to come
2. The moment we trust in Christ and are justified by faith we have entered God’s rest POSITIONALLY

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

3. God is at peace with us and we are at peace with God
4. We cease doing good works to earn God’s favor, but REST IN CHRIST’S perfect works for us in His sinless life and death on the cross

Romans 4:5 to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

5. By faith, we experience that rest when we trust constantly in Christ’s finished work at the cross... whenever Satan accuses us, we set our hearts at rest by the blood of Christ

1 John 3:19-20 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

6. The author to the Hebrews speaks of the joy of a cleansed conscience

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

7. Full assurance of faith is ENTERING GOD'S REST NOW

C. How Will We Enjoy God's Rest Eternally? IF YOU ARE A TRUE BELIEVER

1. You will experience the delight of entering the New Jerusalem to live in the presence of God forever
2. You will experience God, your heavenly Father, welcoming you into His heavenly rest
3. You will be seated at the banquet table of the Lamb, enjoying perfect peace
4. You will be surrounded by the redeemed from every people group on earth entering God's perfect heavenly rest in glory

Isaiah 35:10 the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

5. You will be completely at rest from toilsome labor... the labor of striving to do good works, of striving to defeat the world, the flesh and the devil... of working out our salvation with fear and trembling

V. Everyone Who Does Not Believe Perishes

Hebrews 4:3 Now 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.'"

A. The Alternative to Rest: Wrath

1. The contrast is taught again and again... it's a straight either/or proposition
2. The warnings are here even in this passage... God specifically mentions His oath and His anger
3. The word "oath" implies a settled decision on His part... He is swearing by Himself that no unbeliever will ever enter His rest
4. Beyond that, though, He clearly reveals that such unbelief MAKES GOD ANGRY
5. Hell is a plain display of the wrath of God... it is God's anger that unbelievers will experience forever

Revelation 14:10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.

6. The essence of wrath here is to be cast out from God's rest... condemned to suffer eternally in a place with no rest at all
7. This restlessness is something they already experienced to a lesser degree before the final judgment

B. Satan a "Restless" Being... and So Are All Sinners

1. Satan's restlessness... roaming the earth, filled with fury b/c his time is short
2. The restlessness of sin

Isaiah 57:20-21 the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

C. Hell a "Restless" Place

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

1. This means at least there is no respite... no break from the torments of hell
2. It is literally relentless... day and night the damned suffer in hell
3. Mental restlessness
 - a. A restless heart is one that is filled with turmoil, filled with doubts and fears and anguish
 - b. Buffeted by many troubling thoughts... ripped apart by regrets, by bitter and painful memories
 - c. This kind of psychological torment is at the center of the horror of hell... a MENTAL and SPIRITUAL restlessness
 - d. Forever, the damned are sighing with regret; forever they are blaspheming the name of the God who sent them there; forever, they are buffeted by new waves of torment, dying forever and ever and ever, anticipating the next surge of torment that comes their way

Amazingly, though... the issue of rest comes up in the very next thought in Revelation 14

D. Heaven a Place of Rest

Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

So there is the clear contrast... no rest day or night from torment vs. eternal rest forever in the presence of the Lord

VI. Application

- A. Unbelievers: Combine the Gospel with Faith... I PLEAD WITH YOU to believe; this very day, the rest of God can enter your souls by faith in Christ
- B. Believers: KEEP BELIEVING in Jesus
 - 1. The whole epistle is written against people starting the Christian life but failing to complete it
 - 2. Keep feeding your faith through the word of God
 - 3. Strengthen your grasp on the invisible world of faith
- C. Delight in God's Present Rest
 - 1. Enter in today by faith (again)
 - 2. Rest in Christ's finished work for you
 - 3. Celebrate the perfection of that work
- D. Cultivate a Healthy Fear of Apostasy... Both in YOUR Life and in that of Your Fellow Church-Members
 - 1. The author commands us to FEAR lest any one of us be found to have fallen short of God's rest
 - 2. Do a spiritual check-up in your own life
 - 3. Ask again the question I asked earlier: "Is my faith in Jesus stronger or weaker than it was a year ago?" and "Is my faith in Jesus stronger or weaker than the day I first believed?"
 - 4. Then... ask that same question of others.... Take a strong interest in the spiritual health of other FBC members... start with your home fellowships or your BFL classes... be intentional to get to know each other
- E. Long for your Future Rest in Heaven
 - 1. Anticipate what it will be like to have all your physical, emotional, spiritual, relational needs complete and perfectly met

2. Long for the day when all your enemies—inside and out—will be vanquished and God will give you rest on every side
3. Meditate on the joy that will be in your heart when you lie down beside restful waters in the New Earth and drink from the satisfying streams of the river of life flowing clear as crystal from the throne of God
4. Know that you can scarcely imagine what it will be like to be completely at rest