

Rest!

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[0 : 00] I'd like this morning just to turn back to Hebrews chapter 4 and we're going to look at it on page 1203 and we're going to look at that section through to verse 13.

Because you remember when the book was written, it wasn't written with chapter divisions or verse divisions. So sometimes the chapter divisions don't necessarily fall at the best place to break. So we're stopping at what's more natural verse 13 and then we'll go on and again in chapter 5, we'll not quite go to the end of that, we'll use the paragraph divisions that are in the Bible here.

Now in the old days, maybe 30 years ago or so, there's an element and the number of people here will know about this. You used to go to the cinema and there used to be an intermission in the cinema.

You used to go there and you would get half the film and then there would be a break for your popcorn. And Coca-Cola and then there would be the second half of the film.

Now the reason for that wasn't necessarily not always because the films were really long, although it might have been in some cases, but it was also because the projectionists needed to change the reel in the projection room and put on the second reel because it wasn't digitalised obviously.

[1 : 18] And so there was a break in the film and sometimes the break in the film would be a really tense moment, a really exciting moment and you'd come back to the film and you'd kind of be up there, you'd be tense, waiting for what was going to happen.

Well that's a little bit like what we've done, we've stopped at chapter 3 and we're moving into chapter 4 and there's an interesting word there, there's a word therefore, which is, if you always see that word therefore in the Bible, it means that you really need to read what's gone before because it's a linking word.

So there it has happened, therefore, and the next thing happened. So it links the past, what you've read before to what you're going to read now, and that's significant. It's almost like this is the second half of this section.

And last week we kind of finished, you may have not been aware of that, but we did kind of finish at a bit of a crisis point about the importance of believing and the reality that unbelief wasn't a neutral position but was a culpable position before God.

And therefore if you're an unbeliever, if you don't believe in Jesus Christ, then you were kind of left hanging last week about what to do. Well, you weren't really left hanging but there was this important reality that we believe in God's word as the living word and the challenge went out from His word that unbelief is something we need to deal with.

[2 : 42] And if you're not a believer, then you have had all week to consider that. And I hope that that's something that we're doing increasingly together as we open the Bible.

That city groups, and you've got the questions there inside your bulletin sheet for city groups on Wednesday, which kind of aim to follow up the preaching on a Wednesday evening in city groups. And then this evening there's questions that are not handed out, but there's questions for identity for the young people because we want to make that connection between what has been preached and then applying that in our own lives and working through it and thinking about what it means.

And so there's always this necessity for us to respond because unbelief isn't just for people who have not come to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

It remains something that we battle with as Christians. We're always battling a temptation to not believe. I could put it differently, not to trust. Because when we don't trust God in our lives, it's the same as saying we don't really believe Him.

[3 : 47] So we're always battling with that kind of curse of unbelief in our lives. And so it remains significant for all of us about responding in faith because unbelief is culpable.

And we need to recognise that before God. So we come to this next section, which kind of carries on speaking about the supremacy of Jesus. That's what this whole book is about, it's about how supreme and how important Jesus is.

And it's interesting that it begins with this kind of compassionate concern for those who may have, up to this point, not been believing, or who may have believed, as we saw, because they're part of this Jewish Christian group of people who believed and then were beginning to drift back because they thought Jesus had let them down.

He says, therefore, since the promise of entering this rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. So there's the writer to the Hebrews, whoever that was, because we don't know, but he associates himself with this group of believers.

And he said, look, let's be together. And I have a, I and the other believers have a compassionate concern for your soul.

[5 : 01] And we want you to recognize the importance of coming to that living faith in Jesus Christ and moving through into a stronger faith as you go on.

It's great, compassionate spiritual concern comes through from this pastor, writer. And it's a good thing for us to share that, all of us share that concern for one another, that we're concerned about the outworking of unbelief in one another's lives.

We're concerned if people are involved in the congregation, but don't have a living faith in Jesus Christ and don't believe in our cynical or our atheistic or our unbelieving, because that can happen within the church context also.

And so we have this concern that we all longing, are all longing for people to come to a living faith in Jesus Christ. And we need to be open with one another about that. And part of it even suggests that we need to be honest when we're struggling.

You know, maybe we sometimes say, well, I can't possibly, I can't possibly share the fact that I'm doubting the reality of my faith. Everyone knows and everyone believes so much here. Guaranteed everyone is struggling with their faith one level and another.

[6 : 16] And it's a good thing to be able to be open about that and be concerned for one another at that level. Because it goes on to explain that hearing is simply not enough.

You know, we've 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 it didn't combine it with faith. So there's that relentless element of Bible teaching that reminds us that hearing the gospel isn't enough, which is always where I'm banging on about passive listening.

And why passive listening is not a good thing. Coming to the point where you come to church and where your mind is so zoned and so educated that it switches off.

Immediately the sermon starts because we can get to that point. I'm not aware of it here terribly much, but I do have been in some places where you know the moment you start preaching, there's this mental and spiritual closing.

This is my time for thinking about this coming week or this is my time for daydreaming or this is my time for going to sleep. And there's a kind of a shudder goes over, right over.

[7 : 27] No thought, no challenge, no involvement. And listening can be like that, can't it? Students will know that here, go to lectures. Employees will know that when the boss comes in and starts telling them things.

It just goes all over your head. People come and tell you about instructions and you don't listen. Yeah, I'll learn about that soon. Because we've got that thing where we just don't. And that's why I'm so keen that we recognize and know in a sense why we take the Bible and then go on and discuss it in groups and ask our questions and take your questions and know that we recognize the Bible is so strong about hearing not being enough.

And along with hearing, along with knowledge and knowledge is very important and knowing the Bible is hugely important and knowing the truth is important. But it's taking that truth and being convicted by that truth and being changed by that truth and becoming those who enter into a relationship with the God of that truth through Jesus Christ.

It's never just moralistic. It's never just philosophical. It's never just an accepting of facts. It is taking what we are told about Jesus Christ and entrusting our lives to him.

Hearing combined with faith. Combination, it's a wonderful combination. Those who heard did not combine it with faith. You get lots of strange combinations sometimes, don't you?

[8 : 52] This is a great combination. Hearing and faith. Hearing and putting your trust in God. I was out last night at a lads night, out last night with Ross and we went to Pizza Hut as you do because that's the place to go.

And we were offered a combination pizza like you've never imagined in your life. It was horrific. It was, you know how you get cheese filled crusts?

Well this was a burger crust, okay? So there was eight slices and each slice had a mini burger with cheese on top at the edge of it.

I can't believe they offered you that. How can you offer a pizza that's got a burger in it? Anyway, that was a horrendous combination. Don't go for that kind of combination.

It's not right. It should be illegal. The two things don't go together. But this is a great combination. Okay? Hearing and faith.

[9 : 57] That is trust. So you have to, and I have to get to the mentality where we will trust in Jesus Christ as Christians if we are the last man standing. Or last woman standing.

You know, it's more than just what everyone else is doing. And if we belong to a big church or a small church or a growing church or a dying church or things are good in the church or bad in the church, in our own lives, if we're the last one standing, we will still trust in this dependable Jesus Christ because, as this whole theme of this book is, because he is supreme and he is worth trusting.

So hearing is not enough, but he goes on to then explain that we need to enter his rest. Now, we have believed, enter that rest just as God said.

So from verses 3 to 11, that whole section, it's all about entering God's rest and it talks about the Sabbath rest and it talks about resting in Christ. Now, that obviously relates belief in Jesus Christ. You need to stay with me at this point. Okay? Belief in Jesus Christ is related to the fourth commandment or Sabbath day. And it's related more than that to the seventh day in Genesis chapter 1, where Jesus rested, sorry, where God rested from his work of creation.

[11 : 15] Okay? So there's a link between that resting in creation and believing in Jesus Christ. Stick with this. It's important. There are three ways that the Bible speaks about rest in relation to Sabbath theology.

And we're only going to look at one of them today. There's that rest of coming to faith in Jesus Christ, where we rest from our work.

I'll explain a little bit more about that. And we rest in Jesus for what he has done for us in salvation. There's also the rest that's spoken about in heaven when we come to heaven in Revelation chapter 14 and verse 13.

It says, then I heard a voice from heaven say, right, blessed are the dead who dine the Lord from now on. Yes, says the spirit. They will rest from their labour for their deeds will follow them.

So there's a spiritual rest in heaven. That's the second description or way that it's used. The third description is about resting from our work in order to worship.

[12 : 23] I'll say a little bit more about these. I want to focus particularly on the first one, but it's rest about coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Because the Old Testament people, remember this was written to Jews in the New Year Old Testament, they knew that on the seventh day they rested from all their work.

They even rested from their, in the desert, they rested from making provision for themselves with gathering manna, because God provided for them. And that was speaking to them of something spiritual too, that there would be a future day when they would rest in Jesus salvation.

However, little or much they understood or knew about that. They had to accept God's provision. Then there's that rest that is in heaven, which is that fight and that struggle being over for us.

Right, the Christian life's a fight and a struggle. I was speaking at St. Cath's yesterday, a men's prayer, I was speaking about the need for men to be Christians, and remember that there's this element of tough fighting to stand up and survive as a Christian, spiritually, not physically fighting.

So there's an eternal rest. And then there's this rest from work in order to worship. Now I don't want to look at that, okay, because in the New Year, God willing, we're going to look at the Ten Commandments and we're going to look at that in more detail.

[13 : 41] But just can I say that it's that special day that the rest that's spoken of in terms of the Lord's day is a special day to recalibrate our lives. Okay, all of our lives are to be holy, as Christians, but we've got one day when he says you can rest, okay, rest from your work.

I say to the students, you can rest from your studies. And a special day where you can focus on your Lord and Savior.

Special day. He gives us that privilege. It's for us, the day is for us, the day is a blessing. It should never be a legalistic day. It should never be a day when we think if we try and keep a day special, that we're somehow earning favor with God, nothing about earning favor with God.

Not as an excuse if we keep one day that we have the other six days to go, we can do what we like ourselves. So that we have one kind of day we set apart from God, but the other six are for me to do whatever I like.

None of these things pertain to the teaching spiritually. And we will look at that a little bit more when we go into that particular theme. But this is speaking primarily in this section to verse 11 about spiritual rest.

[15:01] Resting in Jesus Christ because he is worth it. Because he has done the work of redeeming us, rescuing us, putting us right with God. He has done that work.

So what does it look like? Well, it's about rest from justifying ourselves by our own efforts. See in verse 10 he says, for anyone who enters God's rest, that is who believes and trusts in God, also rest from his own work just as God did from his.

So we rest from our own works, which are our own efforts to try and please God and win his favor and gain entry into heaven. Our entry into heaven and into a daily relationship with him isn't based on our efforts, it's based on what Jesus Christ has done for us, absolutely fundamental and crucial for us.

It's saying that we shouldn't think I'm better than other people and that will be good enough for God. You know, I'm better than most and I'm sure God will accept that.

As the philosophy of our Christian living, it's rather, it's grace at work in our lives where we are giving up our control of demanding how we make ourselves right with God and saying he has provided a gift for us in Jesus Christ.

[16:25] You know, how hard it is, isn't it? How hard for some of us harder than others to give up control. We want to be in control. There have been that situation where someone says, let go of the reins for a week while.

Go on holiday, take a week off. You look after the place for you. How hard we find that? This is my baby. It's what I do. I'm the only one that can do it properly. We find that very difficult.

We also find it difficult to accept a gift without feeling that somehow we need to pay it back and earn that gift. We can't earn our salvation and we can't do anything to put us in a right position with God. Jesus Christ has done it for us. We accept that gift. Jesus is saying, you're guilty my friend. You're sinful. You're lost. You're separated from me.

But I love you so much. I am going to hell, says Jesus Christ, in your place. And in the process, crushing death and defeating sin in the way.

[17:27] And Grace says, trust me. Grace of Christ says, trust me. It's done. Stop fussing around my ankles, Jesus says. Do your own good works.

And simply trust in what I have done. Don't despise the cross, but submit and receive the life that He offers through that.

Grace is recognizing God reaching down to us, not us trying to reach up to God and satisfy Him with our efforts. So he says, rest.

Take a break. You don't need to earn your salvation from me. It's a gift because I love you. Rest. I don't need you.

Isn't that hard to accept? He says, I don't need you for this. I simply, all I have from you and this is your sin.

[18:26] I'll take that. But I don't need your efforts. I simply want you to accept this gift. That is resting in Christ. It's not justifying ourselves.

So it's saying, I can't do anything. That's not a problem. That is a great release. It's a great freedom. You know, I've said, well, I need to work. I need to at least go to church 30 times a year. I need to do at least so many good things. How can I possibly please the God of the universe? It's none of these wrestling and anxious and angst filled moments.

It's simply saying he loves us so much. He's done it because we couldn't do it for ourselves. And therefore there's rest there. There's inactivity. We simply accept that. But there's also action involved in this rest.

If we can talk about that because in verse 11, he says, and it's another therefore, it's another cinema intermission, is therefore, let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by following the example of disobedience.

[19 : 35] So there's a paradoxical statement there. He's saying we're resting in terms of offering God our good works in order to save us, in order to be right with him.

Okay, that's we're resting for that. But he's the paradoxical reality is that we need to accept that gift. We need to make every effort to enter into the kingdom of God by it. And Jesus says, I am the way, the truth in the life.

Nobody comes to the Father except through me. So it's coming to Jesus Christ and accepting him and making that tangible decision.

It's that thing where we make every effort. That's not saying it's not a casual statement. Ah, now and again, if you've got nothing else to do, if the rest of your life is completely dull, then maybe think about this.

He's saying make every effort. He's not saying come to church for 50 years and then the month before you think you're going to die, then make yourself right with God because then you'll have the best of your world and then you're right with God and then insurance policy.

[20 : 37] He's not saying that for lots of different reasons obviously. But he's saying there's this great need to be active. So going back to the beginning, not to be content and unbelief, not to walk out and say, well, okay, that's reasonable, but I'm just, I don't believe it's not for me.

Or coming to church and seeing church's a waiting room. I think some people see church as a waiting room like a dentist. They're waiting to be seen and it's something they kind of dread. God will eventually touch them as if they've got no responsibility to wrestle with God and their soul and make every effort.

So if you're not a believer, if you're not a Christian, if you're not committed, if you're standing on the edge, he's saying, you know, that's a place where you should be making every effort. You should be wrestling.

And when we struggle with unbelief as Christians, making every effort to go back to Jesus, to be praying to Jesus, to be searching scripture because unbelief is culpable. Making every effort.

So it's rest, justifying ourselves and yet it's at the same time it's action and accepting and also, this last week, a little bit, which we'll finish with, 12 and 13, it's a recognizing God's judgment of us.

[21 : 54] And I don't mean maybe that in the way that you think, I mean, we'll unpack it in a little bit as we do it. It's recognizing God's judgment. There's a really very famous couple of verses that we use often about the word of God, the Bible.

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword, penetrating even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. What an astonishing statement. And it's interesting, it's a mixed, kind of mixed images, mixed pictures because it talks about the word, like a verbal thing, the word of God, but then it goes on to talk about God's seeing.

So it links the word with God's seeing. Now that's a little bit like someone who knows you well, and when you're talking to them about something, we'll say, look, you're thinking the wrong thing there about someone, because they can, they will speak into your life, and you will say back to them, you can see right through me, because they're right.

So they're speaking into your life, but in response you say, well, it's like you can see right into my heart. And that's a little bit like what these verses are saying. They're saying the word of God, the message of God is really sharp and living and active, and it's almost like it's got eyes.

[23 : 27] It can see into our hearts. So there's that kind of mixed metaphor being used here. It's speaking about the power of God's word. It's not, this is God's own declaration in His word, it's not dead and ineffective.

It's living and active. You need to ask the question, is it? What is it in your life? What is it in my life? It either brings life, spiritual life to us, or it kind of confirms our deadness.

What's it doing for us as we look at it? It's not dead, it's not dead and inactive. It is doing something. Each time we open that living word of God, it is either transforming us or deadening us spiritually.

And we need to think about a response. And I hope that that challenge of God's own description of His word transforms our approach to opening the Bible on a daily basis as Christians. We open the Bible on a daily basis because it's a living word to us. You will find more and more that if you have, that attitude to the living word. We will find that the word of God speaks into our lives because it's His word and He's the living God that we worship.

[24 : 37] And I think that's also the same prayer, but no time to look at that. But it exposes us there, what it's spoken of here, it exposes us to the very core as we read the living word of God.

In other words, it has the ability to go to the no-go areas of our hearts. What does it say? The thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

What's that? That's the place that nobody else knows. It's the place that nobody else goes. We can please some of the people some of the time, we can please all of the people some of the time, but we can't please all the people all the time.

But God knows absolutely everything about our thoughts and our attitudes. What a picture that is of God, either that is a true picture of God, or it's just, if you don't believe that, then it's simply something that is unbelievable.

It's either true or it's ridiculous. And we accept it as true because of the picture and because of what we've come to know about Jesus Christ and how He's changed and spoken into our thoughts and attitudes, but also because of the revelation of Himself as the source of all life.

[25 : 57] The source of all life. You know, even as created people, we've done amazing things. We can do amazing things in terms of knowledge.

I'm sure there's a computer somewhere that knows nearly every movement I make, and that will happen more and more, the more sophisticated we become. If that's what we can do, how much more can God know all these things and know into our hearts, our maker?

It's this recognition that God through His word, through His person, has clocked us. He exposes us, we're rumbled. He knows what we're like.

God knows, we can't dupe Him. And He is the one before whom we have to give account, as He says. The things that we think nobody would ever know about us.

Sometimes the impurity, sometimes the just the thoughts that you just shudder about anyone else finding out God knows all about that. And it kind of takes the feet from us a little bit about thinking, you know, looking at ourselves as good as the next person, I'm sure God will accept me when we know that God knows our thoughts and our attitudes.

[27 : 15] How often are we rebuked ourselves by our attitudes, by our selfishness, or by our pride, or by our ignorance, or by whatever it might be, but God knows.

And there's a conviction within that that is to drive us to amazing grace. Because it's not there to be a big black kind of shadow or cloud over us saying, well, God knows everything and you better watch out.

It's saying God knows everything and He still loves you and still loves me and wants us to accept amazing grace and live in the light of amazing grace.

And it's there to say, it's to remind us that we simply can't make ourselves right with God. The thoughts and the attitudes are too genetically imbibed for us to change.

Too perfection, aren't they? And it reminds us of our need of God's grace because Jesus Christ came and He died.

[28 : 25] For our sins. Life for life. Amazing grace, you know. We would say, maybe we find out something really bad about someone that we have helped or loved or spent time with or committed to.

If I knew what I knew now about them then, I wouldn't have spent the time and energy on them.

They've just taken that and rubbish it. Because very often that's what we think, isn't it?

If I knew now, if I knew then what I know now, and it changes their opinion of people. But God says, what I know now, that absolute knowledge of even your thoughts and attitudes doesn't change my desire to send my son, which we'll look at this evening, to clean us from the inside out.

To make us new, to give us forgiveness, to transform even the thoughts and attitudes of our heart.

Can anyone else make that claim? That Jesus, as our maker, promises to do.

And He says, rest in that. Make every effort. Gratitude simply to serve Him. With the help of His Spirit. He loves us. That's a safe place to be.

[29 : 35] A place of rest. It's great, isn't it? It's great that someone, even in a human terms, it's great, isn't it? When someone who knows what you're really like as much as humans can know what we're really like still loves you.

That's why marriage is so incredible. When it works out. It's when people know you work synonyms, they still stay with you. At a human level, we only see just a tiny proportion.

But God sees absolutely everything. And He still says, come and rest in me. I love you. And I will never let you go.

So Sunday is really a weekly celebration of that for us. It's a visual, three-dimensional, physical walk into the rest that God offers.

That's what it's meant to be. Sunday is that day of grace. It's a day that reminds us of grace of heaven, looking forward to. Because remember God's seventh day never ended, did it?

[30 : 43] There was never a morning and an evening that day. It's a forward looking forward to heaven. But it's always that rest, looking forward from the drudgery of work, which is our lot in this life.

But also it's a high day that speaks of that infinitely greater grace of God for us in Christ Jesus. And that's why we want to wallow in this day in a good way.

And enjoy it and rest and remind ourselves of what it means for us. And may it be that we find spiritual rest, peace, forgiveness and hope in Jesus Christ today.

Amen. Let's bow our heads and pray together. Father God, we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us. We thank you for the description that by your spirit you give in Hebrews as a living and active word.

We pray that it would reflect that living and active relationship that we have come into through our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His rescue and redeeming work on our behalf.

[31 : 55] Bless your word to each of us here today. And we know it will apply differently to each of us as a point of our need. May we learn that great ability of taking it and wrestling with it and applying it.

And may our own people here be in that contractual relationship with us, with me and with each other to be praying for our Sunday services and praying for God to bring His word into our lives in a powerful living and meaningful way.

And that we would not be passive in the wrong way about you. Help us and bless us and accept of our plea for forgiveness in the knowledge that you know things about us that we are afraid even to mentally verbalise to ourselves.

And we thank you for your wholehearted and all embracing forgiveness. Amen.