

God's Rest is the Church's Goal

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[0:00] Right, we're going to turn now to our Bibles and back in the letter to the Hebrews and reading! together chapter 4. You'll know from the last few weeks Edward has been preaching from these! early chapters in Hebrews on the theme of perseverance for the Christian. And they're chapters that are full, aren't they, of great promises but also great warnings. This is how God enables us to persevere. He gives great hope but also real warnings. And the end of chapter 3 ends with those difficult words about those who were disobedient and were unable to enter the land because of their unbelief. Therefore, says the writer, turning to us who are readers of his words today, 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. For good news came to us, justice to them.

But the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest, he has said, 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.

For here some are spoken of the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. And again in the passage he said, they shall not enter my rest. Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to answer because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day. Today, saying through David so long afterward in the words already quoted, today, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works, as God did from his.

Let us, therefore, strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 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 marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

[3:02] 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. Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, good evening, friends. Good to see you all here.

Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 4.

This sermon is the last in this short series in the letter to the Hebrews, and my title for this evening is God's Rest is the Church's Goal.

Now, I want you to imagine that we're all running a race together. It's a long race, 5,000 meters, and we're running on a race track.

[4:38] And as we go round and round the race track, we're getting more and more tired. Many of us are beginning to blow like whales. But eventually, we come round the final bend, and up ahead, we can see the finishing line, and we press towards it.

It's only 100 meters away. But the question is, are we going to get there? Or are our little legs going to give up?

Are we going to keel over and lie exhausted beside the track and never actually make it? Later on in this letter to the Hebrews, the author uses the picture of a race in chapter 12, and he says, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our

faith.

Now chapter 4, like the rest of this letter, presents us again with this most searching question. Are we willing to persevere to the very end in the Christian life?

Are we willing to run the race with the perseverance that is necessary for us to reach the goal of heaven? And the goal is heaven.

[5 : 56] Now the word heaven is not actually used in this chapter because the author of Hebrews speaks of God's rest. But God's rest is what we sometimes describe as heaven.

Another term for it used in Hebrews comes at chapter 2, verse 5, where the author speaks of the world to come, which is to be ruled over by Jesus and his people.

But whether we speak of heaven or the world to come or God's rest, we're speaking of the same great reality, which is the eternal and joyous home of all true Christian people.

But the question is, will we all get there? Will all of us who are here this evening reach heaven? The teaching of Hebrews chapter 4 suggests that not all of us necessarily will.

Jesus' teaching is very clear in the Gospels that not all who appear to make a start in the Christian life will persevere. You know his famous parable of the sower, of the soils, where he speaks of four different types of soil.

[7 : 03] The good seed of the Gospel, the Word of God, is sown on each of these types of soil and three of the four types of soil produce an initial response.

But only one of them produces a plant that grows and matures and perseveres. With the other two, the response is short-lived. A little plant germinates and starts to grow.

But in one case, it withers and dies because the soil is too shallow to support it. And in the other case, it is choked by thorns, which Jesus describes as the cares of this life, concerns for money and possessions and so on, which squeeze right out of a person any ongoing desire to love and serve the Lord.

Jesus also says in Mark, chapter 13, verse 13, the one who is saved is the one who endures to the end. Now, if you are very new to the Bible and the teaching of the Gospel, you might be thinking, but isn't Christianity about how to live in this world?

Is there much point in thinking about the world to come? Surely the Bible is teaching us how to live lives of love and service and compassion. Well, it certainly is teaching us that.

[8 : 23] It has a lot to say about love and kindness and work and marriage and family life, truthfulness, honesty, many other things of a practical nature.

But above all, the Bible's concern is to teach us that Jesus came to rescue us for eternity because by nature we are under the wrath and judgment of God.

Now, Jesus is our great example for how to live in this world, but far more important than Jesus our example is Jesus our Savior. As John's Gospel puts it, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Not a good life in Pollock Shores, but eternal life. Now, do bear in mind that this life is extremely short, but eternity is extremely long.

A thousand years from now, you won't be thinking much about the joys and sorrows that you experienced in 2026. The author of Hebrews chapter 4 is saying to us, if you're a Christian, press on to the real goal of the church, which is God's eternal rest.

[9 : 43] Now, of course, live the Christian life in this world with enthusiasm and cheerfulness. We have plenty of work to do. We have families to raise. We have a wonderful gospel to share with many people.

But the goal is God's rest. And that's what we are to press on towards. Now, let's bear in mind that it's not just the human author of Hebrews who is exhorting us to press on towards eternal life.

It is God himself who is pressing this message into our hearts because it is he who has inspired the writer of Hebrews to say these things. The author of Hebrews, like all the Bible authors, is speaking the very words of God to us.

So it is God, as well as the human author, who is saying to each of us, come on, come on, Freddie, come on, George, come on, Ursula. The Lord Jesus has died for you.

Don't let any amount of pressure or any amount of suffering lead you astray. Don't let any kind of temptation lure you from the racetrack. Keep on running towards the goal.

[10 : 49] Now, that's the heart of the message of Hebrews. Now, we'll get into the details of the passage in a moment, but let me say one or two more introductory things. I said it last week, but it's

worth repeating, and Willie mentioned it a few minutes ago.

The way that the author of Hebrews presses his message into us is by a series of warnings and encouragements. The whole letter alternates warnings and encouragements.

And this is how chapter 4 is constructed. Verses 1 to 13 are a powerful warning, and then verses 14 to 16 are a wonderful encouragement.

In verses 1 to 13, the Lord warns us not to turn away from him, and then in verses 14 to 16, he's giving us a most tender and loving encouragement to hold on firmly and keep persevering.

One of the phrases that our author uses frequently is the phrase let us. Let us do this thing or let us not do that thing.

[11:53] And by using this let us construction, he is, of course, including himself. He's not pontificating from some high and superior place where he's looking down on the rabble.

He's one of the rabble. We're all of us of the rabble. So he's saying to us, we're in this together. So let's notice the let us phrases in chapter 4.

There are four of them. The first comes in verse 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.

Now that is a strong warning. Let's be fearful, he's saying. It is possible, he's saying, that some of my readers will fail to reach God's promised rest. That would be a tragedy.

That would be a disaster. So let's all of us be cautioned and warned. Staying on the track that leads to God's rest. It's actually something that we do together.

[12:51] It's not simply the responsibility of each of us as a kind of soloist. We're to help each other to stay on track. Look back to chapter 3, verse 13. But exhort one another.

Notice that phrase, one another, every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Exhort means give each other warm encouragement.

Take each other by the hand and help each other to stay on course. But, chapter 4, verse 1, let us fear lest any of us should fail to reach God's rest.

Because to fail to get there would be a tragedy. The second let us comes at verse 11. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Now, it's a very similar one to the one that we've just looked at, but it brings in a new idea, and that is the importance of striving. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest.

[13:57] There's grunt work there. There's effort involved. In the 20th century, there was an unhelpful element that crept into the teaching of some churches. There were some preachers who used to say, all you have to do is let go and let God.

As if the Christian life is rather like lying in a warm bubble bath, listening to the strains of Mozart floating in from the next room. Well, that's not the way of the author of Hebrews.

Let us strive, he says, to enter that rest. Effort is involved and vigilance. And why is this striving so necessary? Well, verse 11 tells us.

Because not to strive may mean that we fall by the wayside by the same sort of disobedience, the same as the Israelites did in the wilderness when they failed to press forward to the promised land. Effort, vigilance. If we're to be persevering Christians, we have to take hold of that part of our hearts and minds where we make decisions and resolutions.

[15:03] We have to make certain efforts. It may be a small effort, like the effort of hauling yourself out of your chair at four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, as I guess most of us have done. Quite tempting to sit there in the chair and butter your third crumpet, but you had to make a slight effort to come to church.

It may be a rather bigger effort, the effort of making a nice meal to invite your friends to so that you can encourage each other, or the effort of preparing to lead a Bible study.

That's hard work. The scriptures never give up their treasures to the half-hearted and casual reader. Now those are the first two let-uses in chapter four.

Verse one, let us fear. Verse 11, let us strive. Now the other two are great encouragements. The first comes in verse 14. Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.

Let us hold fast our confession. Our confession means our willingness to speak of our faith. Confession is a speaking word.

[16:08] Paul puts it like this in Romans chapter 10. With the heart, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth, one confesses and is saved. So the Christian is unashamed to say to a

skeptical world, I am a Christian.

I belong to Christ. That's our confession. And Hebrews 4.14 is saying to us, let us hold it fast. In other words, let's be prepared to confess our allegiance to Jesus right the way through our lives. And verse 14 tells us why we can be so bold as to keep publicly confessing our faith. It's because we have a great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has passed through the heavens.

That's what he's done. That's where he is. He doesn't lie buried and defeated in a cemetery in Jerusalem. He rose from the dead. He ascended to the place of highest honor.

His priestly work on our behalf has been completed. As chapter 2, verse 17 tells us, 2.17, as our faithful high priest, he has secured the propitiation of our sins.

[17 : 20] It's a done deal. We're rescued and we can tell the world about it, confess it to the world without fear. Then the final let us comes in verse 16.

Let us then, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Now, our author has just explained in verse 15 that Jesus, our high priest, sympathizes with us in our weakness because, being himself a real human being, he has been tempted just as we are, tempted by the devil to deny God and to forsake the truth.

Now, he never fell to any of the devil's horrible temptations, but he felt the full pressure of them. He knows what it is to be a human being. He knows what it's like to be tempted, to be on the brink of capitulation to sin.

And that is why, verse 16, we can draw near to the throne of grace with confidence. We can say to him, help me, Lord. I'm in danger of denying you by falling into sin.

You know what it's like. You've been there. Rescue me and keep my feet on the narrow way that leads to life. That's a wonderful encouragement to us to know that when we're in danger of falling by the wayside, because of sin, we can turn to him and ask him to steady us and keep us firm, to keep firm our resolve to follow him lifelong.

[18 : 53] He knows what it's like to be tempted and that's why he is so willing to tempt us as we cry to him. Well, let's take a slightly different direction now in this chapter.

What exactly is meant by God's rest? I said a moment ago that it's the same thing as heaven or the world to come, but I want us to think a little bit further about it.

It's first mentioned back in chapter 3, verse 11. Just glance back to 3, verse 11, where our author is quoting from Psalm 95. As I swore in my wrath, says God, they shall not enter my rest.

Now, Psalm 95 was written by King David in the 10th century BC and he was looking back to the time of Moses in the 15th century BC. Moses, as you know, was leading the people of Israel from Egypt, the land of their former slavery, to Canaan, the beautiful land that God had promised to give them.

But when the spies who had gone forward to reconnoiter the land of Canaan came back with a troubling report that the Canaanites looked militarily invincible, at that point the Israelite people's courage failed them and they wept and wailed and threw themselves about and said, oh, we can't go forward, it's too difficult, let's get back to Egypt.

[20 : 18] Now, God had promised the land to them, promised that they would be strong enough to conquer it and possess it. But when the chips were down and the real test came, they didn't believe that God would do what he had promised to do.

Just look at that last verse of chapter 3, chapter 3, verse 19. So we see that they were unable to enter the promised land because of unbelief. God had given them this promise but they didn't believe it and he was angry with them.

Chapter 3, verse 11, I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest. Now, they did enter the land of Canaan some 40 years later but only after the Lord had disciplined them severely by not allowing the unbelieving generation to possess the promised land.

That first generation died in the wilderness. It was their children who eventually crossed the Jordan and marched into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. So God's rest or the land of rest spoken of here in Psalm 95 is the land of Canaan.

Egypt had been the land of slavery. the promised land was to be the place of rest and freedom. But the author of Hebrews opens out the meaning of God's rest in a very intriguing way.

[21 : 38] He traces the idea of God's rest right the way back to Genesis chapter 2. I'll read chapter 4, verses 3 and 4. For we who have believed enter that rest as he has said I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. Now that final sentence in verse 4 is lifted straight out of Genesis chapter 2. You know the story. God created everything in six days and on the seventh day there was a glorious cosmic pause. The work was finished and God rested. Not because he was tired. God is untirable. He's the almighty. But he rested because his work was completed. There was a sense of hallelujah all my plans have come to fruition. And no doubt the angels in heaven sang for joy as they looked around at the majestic vastness of the universe. It was done fully, perfectly. There was no need for snagging or loose ends. [22 : 53] It was perfection. It had been perfectly executed. So the rest of Psalm 95 the rest of reaching the promised land which the Israelites initially couldn't do but were able to do later that rest of the promised land was a reflection of God's seventh day resting after the completion of the creation.

But the rest of the land of Canaan is not the final installment of God's gift of rest. There is still a future rest and God is preparing it for all those who persevere lifelong in following Christ. Look at verse 8 in our chapter 4. For if Joshua had given them rest God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Verse 8 is saying that the rest in Canaan which Joshua brought the people of Israel into was not the final and ultimate rest. It was a kind of geographical rest within the boundaries of the land of Israel but there is another and much more wonderful rest which awaits God's people in the future. [24 : 15] Verse 8 again if Joshua had given them rest full, final and ultimate rest God would have had no need to speak of another day of rest later on.

So, verse 9 there remains there still is a Sabbath rest for the people of God. And then verse 10 looks into a wonderful future and describes something which has not yet happened to Christian people.

The verse says whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Now that's describing our future. You and I by definition have not yet completed our works. I am working at this very moment I'm talking and you are working at this very moment you're listening and thinking and we'll all be doing stuff tomorrow serving the Lord in a hundred different ways.

But the time will come when every persevering Christian will complete their work and then enter God's wonderful and final rest. So the author of Hebrews is showing us how this theme of God's rest develops as the Bible's storyline unfolds.

[25 : 25] The theme begins at the seventh day of creation. it is demonstrated temporarily in the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites and it will come to its final fruition and glory in the world to come.

Now if this is so we need to learn to long for this wonderful rest because it's what God has made us for. It's what Jesus died so as to bring us to.

Remember his words in John chapter 14 I'm going on ahead to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself so that where I am you may be also.

The kingdom of heaven will be dominated by the presence of Jesus and when we are with him we shall have the fulfillment of everything we have ever desired. He says to us in Matthew chapter 11 come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

What then is the message of the author of Hebrews to us? Well let's think of the implications of chapter 4 verse 11. 411 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

[26 : 48] Now that verse makes it very clear that entering God's rest is not a certain outcome for any of us. Let us strive to enter that rest says our author.

Why strive? Because it's possible to fall to fall by the wayside to fall out of the race. By what means? Well the verse tells us by the same sort of disobedience.

Same as what? Well the author is referring to the disobedience of the people of Israel back then who were led by Moses. The danger is that the kind of disobedience they demonstrated is a perpetual temptation for all of us.

So what kind of disobedience was their disobedience? Now I want us to be very clear on this and therefore I want to turn no need for you to turn it up but I want to turn back to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

If you're quick-fingered you might want to go back to 1 Corinthians 10 but I'll read out the relevant verses and explain the context. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul is warning the Corinthian Christians just as the author of Hebrews is warning his readers and Paul says this to them 1 Corinthians 10 1 I want you to know brothers that our fathers he means the Israelites of Moses' generation our fathers enjoyed great spiritual blessings.

[28 : 12] They passed through the Red Sea at the Exodus. In other words they saw the miracle of the walls of water standing up. They were guided by the pillar of cloud. They all ate the manna provided by God.

They all drank from the water that gushed out from the rock when they were thirsty. Nevertheless says Paul with most of them God was not pleased for they were overthrown in the wilderness. In other words they never reached the promised land. So what did their disobedience look like? Paul goes on he says that it showed itself in three ways.

Idolatry sexual immorality and grumbling. Here are Paul's words. Do not be idolaters as some of them were as it is written the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did and 23,000 fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents nor grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer.

[29 : 25] Now in these very strong words Paul is warning the Corinthians and he warns us as well. Let's think about these three things. First of all idolatry. If anything but the true God becomes our God we are worshipping an idol.

an idol cannot save us. It cannot heal us. It cannot improve us. It can only enslave us. An idol is our go-to daydream.

We wrap our souls around it. We fancy that it gives us purpose and identity. We live for it. We love it. But if we keep embracing it it will lead us far from God and from the Lord Jesus.

Second, sexual immorality. The desire to enjoy sex is a powerful element in human life. It is good. It's a God-given desire. But sex is for marriage and outside the marriage bond of a man and a woman it becomes immorality. So if a Christian marries somebody who's not a Christian they're courting disaster.

[30 : 36] That kind of a marriage leads a person away from Christ. Away from the good path which ends in God's rest. And any kind of sexual activity which is outside the safe and lovely provision of Christian marriage is immorality.

Friends, we need to take warning. This is the kind of disobedience that the Israelites practiced in the wilderness and they never entered the promised land. Third, grumbling.

Now we might want to say grumbling. Is that a serious sin? I mean, doesn't everybody grumble? We grumble about the weather. We grumble about a bit of gristle in the roast beef.

We grumble about the government. I mean, surely grumbling is as much a part of human behavior as coughing or burping or scratching your nose. The Israelites in their wilderness wanderings grumbled about their circumstances.

Yes, they grumbled about their food, about their lack of water to drink. They grumbled against Moses and several times rebelled against his authority. But at heart, and this is the point, their grumbling was against God.

[31 : 48] In effect, they were saying to him, why have you done all this to us? Why have you allowed us? Why have you caused us to suffer in this wilderness? So their grumbling was an expression of unbelief.

They were really saying to God, we don't believe that you have our best interests at heart. We don't believe that you are providing for us adequately. And then when the great crisis came, we don't believe that you are really going to defeat our enemies and bring us into the promised land.

So grumbling is a serious form of unbelief. Now to counter our grumbling, the Bible teaches us everywhere to be joyful and above all to be thankful.

So when we grumble about our circumstances, we are really saying to God, we don't believe that you care for us adequately. We don't thank you for the many lovely things that you do for us.

And we are going to gnash our teeth at you for not making our lives easier and more comfortable. And when that happens, a low-level underlying bitterness can develop in our hearts and it can smolder away there for years.

[33:01] Now by contrast, think of the Apostle Paul. Persecuted, flogged to within an inch of his life, hounded from one city to another, imprisoned unjustly for years, but always joyful.

His letters written from prison are overflowing with thankfulness. Now coming back to Hebrews 4 verse 11, our author is showing us that it's possible for any of us to fall by the same kind of disobedience that was shown by Moses' contemporaries, by a form of unbelief which showed itself as idolatry or sexual immorality or grumbling against God.

And verse 11 is telling us to strive to make every possible effort to avoid these sins lest by indulging in them we should fall away from the Lord and never reach his promised rest.

And verses 12 and 13 press home the force of verse 11. I'll read them out. Verse 12 and 13. 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.

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. Those two verses contain very searching words.

[34:33] Our author is telling us here that the word of God, that is the words of the Bible, are not like the words of men. The words of men are weak and they can easily be brushed aside.

But the word of God is alive and active. So it says to us, wake up and listen. Your response or non-response is a matter of life and death.

The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and it pierces us to the very heart of our being. Think of the surgeon. He takes his scalpel and he opens up the body of a diseased human being until the sick part is exposed and can be excised.

And in the same way, the words of the Bible penetrate to the very depths of us. As verse 12 puts it, discerning the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Our sin is revealed by the Bible.

The Bible forces us to acknowledge the corruption deep within us. Forces us to see the ways in which we are wanting to run away from God and wanting to disobey Him.

[35:42] To allow the Bible to deal with us day by day is a tremendous and overwhelming experience. Let us not avoid it, friends. Do we want to reach God's promised rest?

If we do, we need to allow the Bible to open us up, to make us weep if necessary. and to drive us to the Lord so as to beg Him to help us not to fall by disobedience.

I want to read you an excerpt from a book written about 30 years ago by a Bible teacher called David Wells who was working in the United States at the time. But what he said speaks equally to modern Britain.

It's part of a chapter with the title The Weightlessness of God. The Weightlessness of God. He's writing about the way in which God is perceived in the modern world.

It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that He is ethereal but rather that He has become unimportant.

[36:51] He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost His potency for human beings. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider Him less interesting than television, His commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, His judgment no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and His truth less compelling than the advertiser's sweet fog of flattery and lies.

That is weightlessness. It's a condition we have assigned Him after having nudged Him out to the periphery of our secularized life.

His truth is no longer welcome in our public discourse. The engine of modernity rumbles on and He is but a speck in its path. Few would deny that this is the case in our modernized society.

It is less clear to many that it may also be the case, albeit in less obvious ways, in the church. End of quote.

So if the Lord is to carry His proper weight in our lives, we must allow His Word to open us up like a sharp sword. Now the part of the Word of God that our writer is particularly thinking about is the section of Psalm 95 which he's been quoting in chapters 3 and 4.

[38:29] Just look at the three quotations in chapter 4. First of all at verse 3, As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

Then verse 5, they shall not enter my rest. And then verse 7, Today, if you hear His voice, the voice that is sharper than a sharp sword, do not harden your hearts against it.

How then do we keep our hearts from becoming hardened? Well, there's only one way and that is the way of verse 12 to allow the Word of God to pierce us to the very place where soul and spirit divide, to the depths of us, to our very joints and marrow because only then will the real thoughts and intentions of our hearts be revealed to us.

And as verse 13 puts it, No creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Account. We're accountable to Him. We're not free agents. Our lives were never meant to be self-determining. The modern world says to us, Be yourself.

[39:47] Live for yourself. Follow your dreams. Create your own image. Pamper yourself. Give yourself to all that your heart desires. But the Bible says that we must give account to God and that the thoughts and intentions of our hearts are exposed to Him.

So friends, do we want to go to heaven? Do we want to enjoy that eternal and joy-filled rest of being with our Lord Jesus?

Verse 11 tells us that it's possible to fall because of disobedience and unbelief. But the cost of disobedience is more than any of us would wish to bear.

Now in just a moment we'll turn to the final paragraph, verses 14 to 16, which is wonderfully encouraging. But first a question which these chapters in Hebrews are bound to raise in our minds. And here's the question. Is it really God who saves us or is it actually up to us to ensure our salvation by striving?

[40:58] Is our salvation God's work or our work? The Bible's answer is very plain. It is God and God alone who saves us.

In Paul's words in Ephesians chapter 2, we were dead in our trespasses and sins. But because God has loved us, he has made us alive together with Christ.

And Paul says, this is not your own doing. It could never be your own doing. It is the gift of God. It's not a result of our works so that no one can boast. It is by God's grace that we are saved.

So the whole business of turning us around, converting us, setting us on the road to heaven, that is entirely in God's hands. He chose us.

He gave us the new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. He redeemed us. He justified us. He forgave us our sins. It's rather as though we've been placed on a train and the train is heading for the gates of glory and it's all because of his grace and kindness.

[42:07] But if we're foolish enough, we can get off the train. If we really want to, we can prove to be the shallow soil in Jesus' parable where the little plant of faith springs up but then withers.

Or we can be the soil infested with thorns which choke the little plant and kill it. God alone has the power to save us but we can treat his salvation lightly if we want to.

We can allow him to become weightless. We can harden our hearts against him and become disobedient like the Israelites in the wilderness. And this is why in the words of chapter 3 verse 12, chapter 3 verse 12, we must take care lest there be in any of us an evil unbelieving heart that leads us to fall away from the living God.

And this is why in the words of chapter 4 verse 11, we must strive to enter God's rest. And if the sharp sword of God's word exposes in us a desire to be disobedient, we must make every effort to thrust the temptation aside and keep running the race towards the goal.

God alone is our savior. But we can turn away from him if we're unwilling to control our tendency to be disobedient.

[43:32] That's the New Testament teaching. Well, let's turn lastly to the warm encouragement of verses 14, 15, and 16. God is both severe and kind.

Severe to those who make him weightless and turn away from him, but wonderfully kind to the fragile believer who very much wants to reach the goal of heavenly rest.

So verse 14, let us hold fast our confession. There's something beautiful about a Christian who acknowledges openly that he or she is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Imagine the situation. Somebody says to you, are you really a Christian? And you say, yes. And then the person says, do you really believe in this modern day that the Bible is true?

And you say, yes, I do. Now to acknowledge Jesus like that is difficult. You probably get that hot and cold feeling in your stomach.

[44 : 39] If your interrogator is hostile and sneering, you're tempted to say nothing. Not to confess anything. But look at verse 15. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

And why is that? Because he's felt all those weaknesses himself. The verse says that in every respect he has been tempted as we are. The word tempted really carries the idea of being tested because temptation tests us.

The devil is constantly snapping at our heels or creeping out of the shadows and making suggestions to us. He whispers into our ear, don't hold fast your confession of Christ.

When you're challenged, just keep your mouth shut. Life is easier that way. But the author of Hebrews says to us, don't keep your mouth shut. Hold fast your confession.

temptation. Now look at verse 16. Here am I, here are you, being tempted and tested. Where are we going to find the strength to resist the temptation?

[45 : 49] Just think of some aspect of your life, this will be easy for all of us, think of some aspect of your life where temptation regularly assails you. Where do you turn? Is help available anywhere?

Yes it is. This is exactly what verse 16 is showing us. Let us then with confidence, confidence, draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The throne of grace, that's the throne of God. And we know that seated next to the Father is Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. He is the high priest who by the offering of himself has secured the propitiation of all our sins.

He does love us friends. He loves us. And we draw near to the throne of grace. Just look at the end of the verse in our time of need. At that moment of testing, Lord Jesus we cry out, I need your help. I'm hard pressed by fierce temptation. And what is promised to us as we cry out to him? Well look at the verse, mercy and grace.

[47 : 02] mercy to us in our weakness and grace which is the strength which enables us to resist. We are of course weak, we're frail, we're often tempted, so let's learn to cry out to the Lord Jesus again and again.

He will give us mercy and grace in abundance. He will sustain us. It's what he loves to do. And sustained by his grace, we will be able to persevere, to survive all the assaults of the devil, and to reach the goal of God's rest when the day is finally done.

Well let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Amen. Our dear God and Father, you have prepared for us in eternity joys and delights that surpass our understanding.

The joy of being with you, the delight of being with the Lord Jesus. to love him and to be loved by him. So keep all of us steady, we pray.

Help us, all of us, to hold fast our confession with joy and courage and bring us at the end to the safe haven of your glorious kingdom.

[48 : 37] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.