

Hearing God's voice and entering His rest

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[0 : 00] Now we are turning to the letters of the Hebrews and to chapter 3. So far, our author has told us about Jesus, one with God, and one of us.

And he's particularly introduced at the end of chapter 2, a theme that's going to run right through the rest of the letter, the theme of the great high priest. And in a passage full both of warnings and of encouragement, from 3.1 to 4.13, we're going to read now.

Chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses was also faithful in all God's house.

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.

[1 : 23] And we are his house indeed if we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of testing in the wilderness.

When your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years, therefore I have provoked with that generation and said they always go astray in their hearts.

They have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

As it is said today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion. For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?

[2 : 42] Was it not all those who left Egypt, led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

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, just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were united by faith, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

For we who have believed enter that rest. As he 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. And again in this passage he said, They shall not enter my rest, since therefore it remains for some to enter it.

[3 : 54] And those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience. Again he appoints a certain day. Today, saying through David so long afterwards, in the words already quoted, 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 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 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.

Amen. That is the word of the Lord. Now, if we could turn once again, please, to our passage, Hebrews 3 and 4 on page 102, and we'll have a moment of prayer.

[5 : 29] Amen. 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.

Mother, we tremble before this great book. We tremble at the threshold of this text, with its teaching, not just for long ago, but as long as it is called today.

Indeed, we pray, Lord, that unlike your people in the desert, we may indeed hear and obey, and that the words of this passage may become to us the living word of the living God.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. The word rest, which is one of the dominant themes of our passage, means very different things to different people.

To a small child, the word and the concept of rest is most unwelcome, and bedtime is something to be put off as long as possible, as many of you will know.

[6 : 41] On the other hand, to a harassed parent, once that bedtime comes, you can flop down with a cup of coffee. That is wonderful. That is really an anticipation of the new creation.

To someone very busy, someone with a very responsible job, bringing up a family and so on, rest is something which is longed for, the way that the deer pants after the water brooks.

And holidays are a wonderful anticipation of the new creation. And so it is that rest is an idea that means different things to us.

But in our passage here, our author is using this term rest, particularly about the new creation. And as we'll see, this doesn't just mean inactivity, it doesn't just mean a change of pace, it's something far richer and fuller.

He established, as I said, the unique status of Jesus, God and man, who is able to help us, even in this world, and calls us to the world to come.

[7 : 52] Notice, you share in a heavenly calling. Now that is a very rich phrase, the call comes from heaven. It's a call from God himself.

Today, if you hear his voice, is also a calling which helps us on the journey to heaven. As Newton puts it, grace has brought us safe thus far.

And of course, it's a calling which will eventually lead us to the new creation. So it's a very rich phrase. And he's used the phrase, consider Jesus, fix your eyes on Jesus.

That doesn't just mean look, and then look away. It means set him in your sights. Never lose sight of him as we journey to heaven. Now this is a tough passage.

There are some times in the preparation of passages, they seem to fall apart. This week wasn't one of those occasions. Remember, someone told me a few years ago, after I preached a particular sermon, that would have been a great sermon after one more rewrite.

[9 : 00] Brothers and sisters, this sermon would need another five or six rewrites to be a great. Anyway, having evacuated myself of that thought, let's press on, as the author encouraged us.

Look to Jesus and press on. The thought develops in three movements, I think. First of all, we have an, actually, I better have this sheet in front of me, because I keep on changing my mind about titles, so I'll, I'll use this sheet to make sure that I've got the same titles as I, as you have in front of you, or some of you have in, first of all, there is a faithful example, chapter three, verses one to six.

Now, often we are afraid of speaking about Jesus as our example, and it's obvious why. We are afraid that will suggest the gospel of good works, that if we follow him, we'll make it.

But our author has made it perfectly clear, in chapter two, verse 17, previous chapter, that Jesus made propitiation for the sins of the people.

In other words, he cannot be our example, until he's become our savior. Another way, the Christian life can only be lived by Christian people, by those who have been born again, by those who are part of his family.

[10 : 20] However, once that happens, once our sins are forgiven, then the shape of our journey, the pattern of our discipleship, is that of, set out by Jesus, the way of the cross.

It's interesting, only here in the New Testament, is Jesus called the apostle, of our, and high priest, of our confession. Now, since he's going on to talk about Moses, in the next few verses, it's almost certainly, that his Bible open, at the book of Numbers, and in particular, in Numbers chapter 12, verse 7, where Moses is called the sent one, the apostle.

Jesus is our example, Moses was also an example. And there are two things, I think, that's being said here. First of all, he's encouraging his hearers, and he's encouraging us, to realize something, of the faithfulness, and the authority of Moses.

Moses is faithful, in God's house. And God's house here, does not primarily mean, the tabernacle, primarily means, God's people, the people of God.

And the Numbers passage, that I refer to, speaks about, the unique place, of Moses. God says, with him, I speak, mouth to mouth, verse 5, to testify, to the things, that were to be spoken later.

[11 : 48] You see, what's being said, what was said to Moses, was not just, for his own day, it was for us. Indeed, you could go further, you could say, that the Pentateuch, the works of Moses, are more relevant, to us, than they were, to the ancient Jewish people, because we now, see them, see them, fulfilled in Christ.

So there is no authority, in the Old Testament, that bypasses, or supersedes, that of Moses. That's so important, to remember. Moses is honored, as being faithful, he is an example.

So that's the first thing, the faithfulness, and authority of Moses, points to the faithfulness, and authority, of Jesus Christ himself. But the second thing is, Moses was a servant.

That's the other important thing. Verse 3, Jesus has been counted, worthy of more glory, than Moses, as much more glory, as the builder of a house, has more honor, than the house itself.

Moses, the servant, Jesus is the son, but his words, pointed faithfully, to Christ. Christ. There is nothing, in what Moses said, that is contradicted, by the New Testament.

[13 : 02] Indeed, as I said before, if we want to understand Jesus, we need to know, the scriptures. I said before, it's a vain hope, it's not going to happen. I wish I could encourage us, to use the term scriptures, for the whole book.

It's not going to happen. But, there's no point, there's no harm, in crying for the moon, if you don't get it. And, and this is what, gives us confidence, trust, and obey, as we sang.

Now, there is no other way, trust the promises, and obey the commands. That's really what it's about. So, we consider, Jesus, the apostle, and high priest, of our profession, as he calling us, to the heavenly calling.

Remember that, Jesus has not only, reached heaven, and he's not only, seated at the right hand, of God, he is alongside us, to help. Let me particularly, look at next year, next week, when we look at the, great high priest, who has both, gone into heaven, and is alongside, to help us.

We honor, Moses, but we honor him, as a fellow servant. And that's so important, not just Moses. Let's get rid of, this celebrity culture, that we are so fond of, in evangelicals.

[14 : 23] Let's stop talking, about gurus, as if they had, not one of them, can you say, they have gone, through the heavens, and ascended, to the right hand of God. They are fellow sinners.

And I think, we need to remember this. And because, Jesus, has reached the goal, we know, that it can be done. Now, remember the people, whom this is being, addressed originally.

Third generation Christians, probably, who have become disillusioned. Probably, in danger of falling away. We'll come back to that, in a moment. So, first of all, we have a faithful example.

Fix your eyes, on Jesus. Jesus, trod the road, before us. Jesus is at the goal. But Jesus is also, alongside to help. Secondly, we have a powerful warning.

Chapters 3, verses 7 to 19. A serious call, to persevere. Serious call, to finish the race. This is returned to, in chapters 11 and 12.

[15 : 25] And this time, he opens his Bible again, and he opens it, to Psalm 95. Now, it's interesting, it's interesting the way, our author talks about it.

He talks, he quotes the Psalm, and then, he says, therefore, as the Holy Spirit says. We've noticed this before. It doesn't matter, really, the human individual.

It's the fact, this is the word of God. Although, later on, in chapter 4, verse 7, he's going to say, through David, so long afterwards. Psalm 95, as you know, is a psalm, divided into two parts.

One is the most, the most beautiful lyric, of praise and thanks, of him. Come, let us worship the Lord. Let us bow down, before the Lord, our maker. For the Lord, is a great God.

And then, suddenly and abruptly, he breaks into warning. Today, if you hear my voice, do not harden your heart. One of the things I really enjoy, is good singing.

[16 : 31] Just imagine, one evening, we're all singing our hearts out, bowing down, before the Lord, of our salvation. A voice, rather abruptly, breaks in.

I wish, just for today, you would shut up, and listen. Now, that is the, that is the effect, of Psalm 95.

Because it's not addressed, to people, who are apostates. It's not addressed, to people who are worshipping, Baal, or worshipping, the Queen of Heaven. It's addressed, to people who are, bowing down, before the rock, of their salvation.

Singing their hearts, to him. So, the test is not, am I singing, and praising, but am I listening, and obeying? That is ultimately, the test.

This particular, refers to the episodes, in Exodus 17, and then again, in Numbers, Numbers 13, and 14, where essentially, the people, wanted to go back, to Egypt.

[17 : 30] Now, it's very important, I've said this before, in other contexts, to distinguish, between moaning, and complaining, and lament. In the lament, Psalms, and scripture, we saw many examples, in the book of Jeremiah, the book of Job, of course, and the Psalms, themselves.

These are powerful, expressions, of the mystery, and the agony, that souls can find, lost in this world. Whining, is what is called, the evil, and unbelieving heart.

Verse 12, take care, lest there be any of you, an evil, unbelieving heart. So, what do we learn, from this then? First of all, this is about, persistent, unbelief.

Verse 9, they always go, astray, in their hearts. This is not, the odd lapse. This is the, persistent, refusal to listen. There are many times, when we lapse, aren't there?

We all have, many flaws. The letter of James says, we all offend, in many ways. This is not, that. This is a deliberate, persistent, turning away, from God.

[18 : 42] It's not heresy, it's not believing, the wrong things. The New Testament, is a great deal, to say about, false teaching. Letter of Jude, for example, Paul in his, later letters, John in his letters, and Peter, in his second letter.

There's no evidence, here, in the letters, of the Hebrews, that people, were listening, to false teachers. The problem was, they were listening, to true teachers, but he was passing, over their heads.

That seems to be, the problem. These are people, who had had good teaching, for several generations. Chapter 13, verse 7, remember your leaders, those who spoke, the word of God, to you.

There's twice, leaders are mentioned, at the end of Hebrews. One case, it's the present leaders, of the community, of that time. But here, it's those, who had spoken, in the past.

Not, seriously, taking it, on board. Hearing it, and then going away, unchanged, to come to James again, looking at our faces, in a mirror, then going away, and doing nothing about it.

[19 : 46] Persistent unbelief. Then the need, to persevere. This is going to be, a persistent theme, of the letter. However, need to persevere.

Verse 14, we share in Christ, if indeed we hold, our original confidence, firm to the end. Now, I think, what's being anticipated here, the passage we'll look at, the difficult, troubling passage, we'll look at, in two weeks time, about what happens, to those who fall away.

And remember this, in particular, that that passage, is talking, as this passage, about persistent, unbelief. This is more, talking about, the daily routines, the costly disciplines, which make up, Christian living.

So there's, persistent unbelief, there's need to persevere. And then, in verse, 13, and it's repeated later, the daily relevance, of all this, as long, as it is called, today.

When do we need, to hear this? Yesterday? Tomorrow? No, no, says our author, today. Now, since there is never a day, that is not called, today, there will never be, a time on earth, when we do not need, this word.

[21 : 00] And also, the day, is of course, the last days, that the author speaks about, the day of grace, the day, between the comings. It's not, there is never a time, when it will be, irrelevant.

As I say, this is called, unbelief. Not the occasional failure, but deliberate rejection. Good example of this, in the last battle, the end of the Narnia stories, when, when the creatures gather, and the dwarves, persistently refuse, to enter, the kingdom.

Aslan provides them, in the stable, delicious food, glasses of wine, and so on. They taste them, they say, oh, this tastes like a piece of turnip, all decaying matter.

You see, it's the, they're offered, the only food, that will sustain them. They turn their backs on it. Offer the only gospel, that will, that will sustain them.

And, this is what so often happens, when the gospel is presented, to people, isn't it? They, it's not so much, they don't understand it, it's that they have no relish, for it, if you like.

[22 : 12] The rest, the word taste, is used several times, in this, in this letter. So, this is a powerful warning. Read the Old Testament, read Psalm 95, says our author, and don't do what they did.

Don't fall away. Verse 17, with whom, was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell, in the wilderness? And verse 19, we, so we see, that they were unable, to enter, because of unbelief.

See, our author is terrified, that this generation, of Christians, same is going to happen, to them, as happened, in the generation, in the desert. Now, it's very clear, that shortly, after the close, of the first century, things started, to go wrong, very badly, in the church.

You can see, how it happened. Remember, Paul, remember what Paul does. Paul trains, Timothy, tells him, to train, faithful people, able to teach others. At some stage, that clearly ceased to happen, or it ceased to happen, on a widespread, on a widespread, way.

Because, it's not enough, to teach yesterday. We've got to keep on, teaching today. Today, if you will hear his voice.

[23 : 32] Remember, you get the same thing, at the end of, at the end of the book of Joshua. Joshua, we're told, that Joshua, the people, believed God, all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders, who outlived Joshua.

Something went, badly, badly wrong then, resulting in the book of Judges. That's the, so, this is, this is the danger. Once we stop, passing on the word, once we stop, encouraging each other, to trust, and obey, then we are in, real, real danger.

See, it doesn't need heresy. Sometimes it is heresy, sometimes it is unbelief, sometimes evil living. Sometimes it is just unbelief, persistent unbelief.

And that's, that's what our author is warning against. So, we have a, we have a, faithful example, we have a powerful warning.

And now in chapter four, we have a future rest. Therefore, well, the promise of entering his rest still stands. In other words, you are in danger, you're at the edge of the precipice, but there's still time to draw back.

[24 : 45] I think that's the important, the door of entry is still open. It's a stern warning, but there is also a gracious invitation. And the first thing he talks about is the need to receive the word with faith.

Verses one and two. The good news came to us, just as to them, verse two, but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by it with faith, by those who listen.

They heard the words, they didn't disbelieve them, but they didn't embrace it with faith. That's been the problem. And I think, I mean, that is a warning, but it's also an encouragement.

We are still in the last days. It's easy sometimes to think we've arrived too late in the history of salvation for God to do anything very wonderful.

People talk nostalgically about the days of the past. It may be the golden days of the covenants. It may be the days, which is in living memory of the Tell Scotland Crusade and Billy Graham.

[25 : 52] Maybe you read about the Wesley brothers and Whitfield, the wonderful things that God did. But remember, this good news is for the whole of the last days.

As long as it is called today, the door of entry is still open. And we mustn't rob ourselves of that by dwelling in an imagined past.

And the past wasn't all that wonderful. After all, the past gave us the present. And as long as it is called today, he says, listens. And that rest is still open.

This somewhat complex passage, but I think the verse three, for we who have believed enter that rest, as he said. In other words, we enter it on earth, even on earth.

And he has somewhere, verse four, spoken of the seventh day in this way. So again, you cannot possibly believe that the author didn't know this was the end of Genesis one, the beginning of Genesis two.

[26 : 53] Once again, saying right from the very beginning of God's creation, the seventh day has stood for rest. Remember, there is no eighth day. And the point is that when God rested, it's not inactivity.

It doesn't mean he did nothing. It's rather like, it's rather like what is also said about Jesus, finish the work and sat down forever at the right hand of God. It's not the rest of inactivity.

It's the rest of a task fulfilled and taking up other tasks. So, the rest is still open to us. Compare Genesis one and two and Revelation 21 and 22.

Revelation one and two talk about, if you like, the original rest, paradise, the unspoiled human environment. And then Revelation 21 and 22. His servants will serve him, says John, and they will see his face.

Heaven, new creation, will be a place of glorious, wonderful activity. A place where all the potential that was not realized on this earth will be realized.

[28 : 04] Now, I'm not talking about bad things. I'm not about sinful things. All of us, certainly those of us who are older, can look back on things and wish they could have happened differently.

So, I say, I'm not talking about evil things. I'm talking about things that might reasonably have been fulfilled. Now, it seems to be in the new creation, every talent God has given us, every, every gift he has showered on us, which partially are expressed on earth, will be fully expressed in the new creation.

His servants will serve him. That's glorious beyond imagining. And as he, and you see, as he says, bringing together all these passages, Genesis, the creation story, it's written into that from the very beginning of creation.

Long ago, William still wrote a booklet, which is still worth reading, Rhythms of Rest and Work, which, of course, God built into the pattern of creation.

And then, so much longer, he speaks through David, and points out the rest is not the promised land, but the new creation. There remains, verse 9, a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

[29 : 17] Whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works, as God did from his. So, it does not mean we sit back and do nothing, but it does mean we recognize the grace of God, which sustains the grace of God, which will finish the work.

And finally, the section ends with a further emphasis on the living power of the Bible. You see, that's why, I think that's why, anyway, I call this, what do I call this sermon, hearing God's word, and entering his rest.

They are totally licked. And that's part of the point of these, of these verses. Notice, let us therefore strive to enter into that rest.

It's a gift of God. We need to appreciate it. You know how gifts, if they're not used, not appreciated. My little granddaughter's first birthday, a few months ago, she was not a slightest interest in her gifts.

All she was interested in was the colored paper. Now, that's very like us, often with the gifts of God, isn't it? We're interested in the colored paper that wraps them. Now, says our author, enter that rest.

[30 : 24] Make a positive, if you like, make a positive decision. I am going to enter into this rest. It does not depend on me and my frenetic activity.

If I take a day off, the kingdom of heaven is not going to grind, to a halt. Indeed, let's be honest, brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God may actually profit greatly from my day off.

And I certainly will. So, but in this life, the word of God, notice the heart, which is the whole person. It divide the division of soul and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This word penetrates us like, like a sword. But notice, and this is where I think the whole thing links together. Verse 13, no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him, to whom we must give account.

And when do we give account to him? Well, Paul uses different language. You must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Jesus talks about the parable of the talents and so on.

[31 : 34] So, when do we give account to him? We give account to him when he returns, when, as Revelation says, the books are open, when our lives on earth are over, and we have entered into the rest.

It's interesting, so often, we rightly, very, very rightly, tremble at the coming of Christ. as we sang this morning, lo, he comes with clouds descending.

Awesome, terrifying, but at the same time, it's a richly rewarding experience. It's interesting. Psalm 98 says, talks about creation.

Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains dance for joy. Let the trees rejoice together before the Lord. For he comes, for he comes to judge the earth.

And when he judges the earth, all the things that take away rest, all the things that take away peace, all the things that take away joy, they no longer be there.

[32 : 35] So, in other words, rest is not inactivity. Rest is what Romans calls the glorious freedom of the children of God. So, brothers and sisters, let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that none of us may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, how frenetic and busy we are. How reluctant we are to enter into rest.

Lord, give to us that, give to us that gracious and loving nudge by your Holy Spirit. That wonderful assurance that you are working out everything.

according to the purpose of your will. And that your purposes are purposes of grace. To give us a hope and a future. And we praise you for this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.