

Take Care! Only a Hearing Faith Holds Fast

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading today, which you'll find in Hebrews at chapter 3 and 4. It's page 1002 if you have one of the church Bibles. It's a long reading this morning, but this section really all goes together.

You'll remember last time we came to the end of chapter 2, and there's wonderfully comforting words about the Lord Jesus, a merciful and a faithful high priest in the service of God.

And because he himself was tested through suffering, he's able to help those who are being tempted and tested, to help all of us. And at the end of chapter 4, we come back to the great high priest again, who's able to sympathize with our weaknesses, to help us when we're tempted, to give us grace and help in time of need.

But within those brackets of wonderful consolation, the rest of chapters 3 and 4 here do bear us a very solemn warning. So let's read these words together.

Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 1. Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, 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 also Moses was faithful in God's house.

[1 : 25] 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.

And Moses was faithful in 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, his household as a son, and we are his household, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit is saying, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years.

Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said, they always go astray in their heart. 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's cold today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[2 : 48] For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold fast our original confidence firm to the end. As it said, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion.

Who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt by Moses? And with whom he was provoked 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 be seen to have failed to reach it. For good news, gospel 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.

[3 : 54] As he 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 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, 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 afterward, in the words already quoted, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

For if Joshua had given them rest, that is in the land of promise, 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.

[5 : 03] 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 marrow, and discerning the thoughts and the 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. Since, therefore, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Lord, do turn up your Bibles to the passage we read, Hebrews 3 and 4.

And the question here this morning really is this, what is real saving faith? And how can we be really sure of our salvation? That's a question I think many Christians worry over, but it's one that the book of Hebrews helps us understand so that we'll have real assurance and confidence in our Christian lives.

But part of finding real assurance and confidence means undermining all false assurance because that can be deadly to true faith.

[6 : 36] And that actually is what our passage today is all about. Our real confidence, as chapter 3 verse 6 here says, indeed, our exultant boast as Christians is our hope.

Do you see? It's in God's promise of the future, of the world still to come. That's what he's speaking about all through Hebrews. We saw it last time in chapter 2 verse 5.

So our confidence is in a world as yet we cannot see. But we have God's presence with us to guide us and to guard us and to help us all along the way, unseen but not unheard.

We have the voice of the invisible God, but he is speaking to us today and every day in his word, which is living and active, which is a powerful two-edged sword, both to sustain and to save those who are hearing his voice, but also to judge and to destroy those who refuse his voice.

We can't see him at present. But as chapter 4 verse 13 says so plainly, no creature is hidden from his sight. God will assure us, God will hold us fast by that word, but if we stop listening, if we drift, then we are in real danger because that is to neglect a great salvation.

[8 : 02] And as chapter 2 verse 3 says how on earth will we escape if we do that? And so the overriding message here in these chapters of Hebrews, it's right there in chapter 3 verse 12. Do you see? Take care, brothers and sisters.

Only a faith that keeps hearing keeps holding. We're held fast only by a truly hearing faith. We're on the very verge of a glorious inheritance.

We're in these last days. That's the first verse of chapter 1. The promised world to come is near. Jesus, our champion of salvation, is already crowned with glory and honor in the heavens.

And our inheritance is secure, but our full salvation lies still ahead. And in chapter 9 we're told we're eagerly awaiting for Jesus to appear again at last to save us, to lead us into that glorious inheritance.

But we're not there yet. and we're still living within, yes, a great deliverance, but also surrounded by great danger. There are many trials and testings and temptations to turn our eyes away from that great hope, to seek peace, to seek appeasement with this passing world.

[9 : 18] And that's why Hebrews writes what he calls a word of exhortation, to keep our eyes fixed on the hope that's to come to Jesus alone, and to run with endurance, our eyes always on that great prize that lies ahead.

It is a message of great encouragement and assurance. As I said, the end of chapter 2 and the end of chapter 4 there are bracketing this whole passage with the confidence that we have in a gracious and merciful high priest to whom we can draw near constantly to receive help for time of need.

But in between those brackets of great comfort and assurance are these chapters with very real warnings to us. We're standing on the brink of a glorious inheritance, just as Israel were in the old days, on the boundaries of the promised land.

And we must not be like them, like that generation, who fell woefully short. Chapter 3, verse 12, take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Or chapter 4, verse 1, let us fear, lest any of you should seem to have fallen short and failed to reach it. Chapter 4, verse 14, since we have a great high priest, let us hold fast to our confession.

[10 : 45] You see, there's no room, is there, for presuming. Because, as chapter 3, verse 14 says, we share in Christ if, if, indeed, we hold fast our original confidence firm to the end.

And you'll do that, says verse 15, only if today and every day you are hearing God's voice and not hardening your hearts. You see, that faith that saves is a faith that hears and goes on hearing God's voice and obeying God's voice.

Because that's what real faith is. It's the opposite of disobedient unbelief. it's the heart that rejoices in the rule of Christ the King and trusts Him and obeys His word.

It's not the heart that rebels against His rule and distrusts Him and therefore disobeys His word. So there's no room for presumption.

It's not enough, says John Calvin, remember? It's not enough for us to embrace God's teaching, that is the gospel, with a ready mind unless we show that we are obedient to Him with the same teachableness tomorrow and every day.

[11 : 58] Only a hearing faith holds fast. The writer here is not questioning God's eternal election. He's not questioning God's sovereignty in salvation.

Of course not. Don't get distracted here with questions of God's secret will and purpose. These words are for planet Earth. They're for you and me in our real life.

God is speaking to us just very, very plainly. He's simply saying to us this, that if you're ignoring God, if you're not obeying God's voice as His living word, then it doesn't matter what bold profession you made in the past or even what profession you might make today.

If you're not listening and heeding His voice, you can have no assurance that you have real saving faith. Because the Bible is perfectly plain. Real faith is response to God's word.

faith comes by hearing, says the apostle Paul, and hearing through the word of Christ. And our passage today makes very clear that the real hearing of faith is visible in the obedient response, not in disobedient rebellion to God's word.

[13 : 10] And that's a warning that we all need. Somebody told me just the other day of a relative of theirs living in a very ungodly and perverse sexual relationship. But whose father said, oh, but it's all right, I've got the assurance that he's a Christian.

Well, friends, I'm afraid the Bible here is very plain. There can be no such assurance like that. Take care is the word of warning. So let's look more closely and we'll take this long passage under four headings.

First of all, verses 1 to 6 of chapter 3. The writer points us here to the privilege of election, to the real privilege of participation in God's household in Christ.

These verses speak about us being in our true home at last under his eternal rule. Verse 6, Christ is faithful over God's house, his household as a son, and we are his household.

Now he's speaking, verse 1, to professing believers, isn't he? Holy brothers and sisters who share in a heavenly calling, the privileged election of God's household, to whom Jesus the great apostle has revealed God's glory, and Jesus the great high priest has redeemed for God's glory.

[14 : 25] They have the glory of God's ultimate revelation and the grace of his ultimate redemption. An extraordinarily privileged calling. Far greater in these last days than ever in the days that have gone before, the days under Moses, even with the great miracles of the Exodus and the great majesty of Mount Sinai.

Because verse 2, do you see, Jesus fulfills all God's promises from the former days. He's the one that God promised to David, would at last build his house forever and be the faithful royal son who ruled his house forever.

These words are taken from Nathan's words to David. Of course, Moses was faithful. He says that in verse 2. But Jesus is far more glorious than Moses, says verse 3.

Why? Because he's the son of God. He's the one at last who has come, the one to whom Moses was speaking about and pointing forward to. See, verse 5 says Moses was a faithful servant in all God's house, but Jesus is faithful over God's household.

He's the ultimate ruler. And we are his household. It's the same language Paul uses speaking to Timothy. The household of God, the church of the living God. What an immensely privileged calling we have in these last days.

[15 : 49] Far greater than ever before. But of course, when you have far greater privileges, you have far greater responsibilities. And we must have far greater respect for the voice that speaks to us through Jesus than ever.

Even the voice of Moses. Verse 5 there is leading to Numbers 12 7, where God defends Moses as his unique mouthpiece with total authority to speak for him.

His brother Aaron and sister Miriam grumbled against Moses. Is it only through Moses that you speak? What about us? And God said, yes, listen to my servant Moses.

He's faithful in all my house. there's no other revelation coming at the moment except through him. So listen to him and respect his voice.

Don't grumble against him. And Miriam, do you remember, was stuck with leprosy for her presumption. But now, how much more with the privilege of the church's calling in these last days, how much more must God's people submit and not ignore grumble against, his ultimate ruler over his household in the person of his son.

[17 : 05] We share the privilege of an ultimate heavenly calling. And by the way, that's both a call to heaven for us, but it's also a direct call from heaven to us now in the person of the son.

Our word of gospel is not mediated through Moses and angels. It's unmediated by the son of God himself. We can't possibly presume, can we, on our calling?

That's the urgent call all the way through Hebrews. Pay attention to God's voice. This is chapter 2 verse 1. Right at the end, chapter 12, see to it that you do not refuse him who's speaking.

Because if they didn't escape when he warned them from the earth, how much less will we escape the one who warns us from heaven? We have the privilege of a heavenly calling, participation in God's household in Christ.

And we've come to our true home. But that means, you see, that we have come under direct rule. No longer just through Moses, God's servant, but through Jesus, God's son, who is over his whole household with great and ultimate authority.

[18 : 19] Remember Moses' words at the end of his life. We saw it when we studied Deuteronomy. Choose life, he said. Love the Lord your God, obey his voice, hold fast to him, for he is your life.

Well, how much more with the great privilege that we have, must we also, as verse six says here, must we hold fast our confidence in our hope for the future? Which means holding fast to Jesus Christ, not refusing to submit to his rule and to his word, but loving him, obeying him, holding fast to him who alone is our life now and forever.

And you see, we will do that only if, as verse seven says, we are hearing his voice today and not hardening our hearts, as that generation of Israel of old did, to their great ruin and to their great regret.

And you see, that for us is a very sobering word of warning, and that's what verses 17 to the end of the chapter are speaking about. They're speaking about the peril of exclusion, the very real peril of presumption in God's household in Christ.

These verses are speaking to us about the horror of eternal ruin. Make no mistake. Verse 19, they were unable to enter God's rest because of their disobedience, their unbelief.

[19 : 48] And so will you be, and so will I be, the writer is saying, if you don't keep listening to his voice and I don't keep listening today and tomorrow and every day.

The whole discussion here in chapters 3 and 4 are centered on Psalm 95 that we sang at the beginning and that's what's quoted here in verses 7 to 11. And notice in verse 7 he says, this is the Holy Spirit speaking now to us, just as God's voice spoke first of all in Moses' day and then later on in the in the Psalmist day.

It's God's word because once God has spoken his word is living and enduring and active. And the writer is applying it directly to the New Testament church.

I'm speaking to you, he says, do not harden your hearts as they did in that rebellion. As you did in the rebellion is how the NIV translates it very powerfully, very personally because all through this chapter it's very personal.

You see all the you's and the we's and the us. Us I'm speaking about, he's saying. And he's giving a real warning to those who are within the professing church of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 05] He quotes part of Psalm 95 here, but of course he assumes the message of the whole psalm, the very important psalm. It was a psalm that was read at the beginning of every Sabbath evening synagogue service.

I suppose that's how it eventually found its way into the book of common prayer, the Anglican book of common prayer, the beginning of every Sunday morning service, the ventry. Oh come, let us sing to the Lord, the rock of our salvation.

And he goes on to declare because he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, we are the sheep of his hand, we are God's people. great confidence, great assurance in the rock of salvation for the flock of God.

But you see, if you are his sheep, then he's your shepherd. That means he is your leader, he is your ruler, he's the one whose rod and whose staff of discipline is your rule, he's your lord and king.

And so the psalm goes on, doesn't it, to say don't presume upon your election as his sheep. My sheep, says Jesus, are the ones who hear my voice. So the psalmist says, hear his voice, don't harden your heart, pay attention to your shepherd.

[22 : 23] That's the whole point of the psalm, that's what it's saying, pay attention to your shepherd, your ruler. And the writer here is saying, you see, this is written for us, there's a real warning today.

Paul says exactly the same thing, by the way, in 1 Corinthians 10, where he relates Israel's stubborn history. And he says, it's written for us, lest anyone who thinks he stands today needs to take heed unless he falls.

Take care, brothers, lest any of you should fall away from the living God. That generation, verse 8, is very clear. They rebelled, they refused God's call to enter the land at Kadesh Barnea.

Remember, Joshua and Caleb came back with a wonderful report of the land, land, but they refused. That was the great rebellion of that generation. Of course, it didn't begin there, did it?

It began long before in their hearts and in their ears because they stopped listening to God and his voice. Verse 10, always they go astray in their hearts, he said.

[23 : 26] They presumed upon God. They said, oh, we're his people. We're the flock of God. He's our rock of salvation. He brought us out of Egypt. He's on our side. He'll always fight for us. Doesn't matter if we stop listening a bit.

Doesn't matter if we just go our own way a bit. Don't have to be quite so super serious as we used to be in the first flush of faith. And so drift, you see, led to disobedience and led to neglect of their salvation.

And the end result was verse 11 here. They faced the wrath of God and exclusion from the land of promise. Their drift from hearing God's voice robbed them of their confidence and their hope, which was the whole goal of their calling, which wasn't just escape from the land of Egypt to wander about in the desert.

It was to get to the land of God's promised rest. But they lost their hope. And so in the end, having started out with God, they petered out.

They saw God's power, but lost their rest. And the writer here is saying, friends, we as Christians today, we're in danger in just the same way.

[24 : 39] The danger of presuming. But if you believed and said you've accepted Christ and his forgiveness in the past, well, that's all there is to it. You just say, oh, once saved, always saved.

We're God's people. They'll always save me. Not so, says the Bible. Look at verse 14. We share in Christ if, indeed, we hold fast our original confidence to the end.

Our confidence in which lies ahead. Verse 6, in our hope. See, the New Testament gospel of Christ in us is the hope of glory to come. That's what Paul says in Colossians chapter 1.

We proclaim Christ, he says, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone complete in Christ. We keep warning people and teaching them because we're not there yet.

We need to endure. We need to hold fast to the end, says verse 14 here. There's no place for presumption in the New Testament gospel faith. Partnership with Christ means perseverance with Christ.

[25 : 44] That's what verse 14 means, plainly. Sharing in Christ means staying the course, which means going on in obedience faith, not drifting into disobedient unbelief.

Whoever you are, however long you've been a Christian, however firm and sure you think you are. Because anything else he's saying here is sheer presumption.

It's the deceitfulness of sin that verse 13 speaks of. That deceives you, you see, into thinking you can have the first part of Psalm 95, God is our rock of salvation, without the second half.

But you see, you can't have the rock of salvation without the ruler, who shepherds you by his enduring word, his command. You can't have the hallelujahs without the hearing.

To worship him means to bow down, to hear and to obey his voice. And so, friends, that's why you see there's always real danger of presumption still within the household of God, within the church of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 47] And especially perhaps in those who feel because of their superior theological knowledge, they're very confident that we are God's true household, that we believe with a rock-solid assurance of our salvation.

It's precisely to people like that that he's writing these words, take care, brothers and sisters. Let me read you something I got this week in a letter from Dick Lucas, 94, with 70 years of experience in ministry.

I told him I was preaching on Hebrews in this passage, and he wrote me a letter including these words. This passage is a telling reminder of the perils of presumption, seen especially, for example, in elect groups like the Exclusive Brethren, like Extreme Pentecostals, who have a history of immorality within their leadership.

Now I know some of you here have experienced exactly that in the past, the presumption of those who think they have a special calling, that they are the true church, that they have the deep theology, but you see in their pride, in their presumption, they actually are stopping listening to the real living word of God in Scripture, and they're being deceived instead by the deceitfulness of sin.

So while they think that they are special, that they are holy, that they are the elect of God, in fact, their deafness has led them into drift, into rebellion. In fact, to be called, as this passage does, unbelievers.

[28 : 17] That's how it begins, doesn't it? In verse 12 and verse 19, his application of the message of the psalm to the Christian church. Because real faith, you see, hears God's word and heeds God's word in Scripture.

Real faith obeys. Unbelief finds its concrete expression in disobedience. Look at verses 18 and 19. Those who were disobedient were unable to enter because of unbelief.

He's not talking about sinful lapses that we make as Christians. Every one of us makes sinful lapses every day, never mind every week.

But he's talking here, isn't he, about an attitude that begins in the heart. And if it's unchecked by the correction regularly of God's word, it will lead in the end to rebellion, to unbelief.

And none of us, he says, dare presume, whoever we are, that we're exempt from these warnings. Privilege, high privilege, does not exempt us. We all need to take care, brothers and sisters, lest it be you or lest it be me.

[29 : 26] And that's why, look at verse 13, you see, that is why we need one another. Because sin is such a deceiver and our hearts are so very vulnerable. It's so easy to be self-deceived, isn't it?

And so he says you've got to exhort one another. Every day. Perhaps these house churches met together every day for a time of sharing and exhortation. Well, he's saying we need God's word daily.

Certainly, he's saying we need to exhort one another very frequently. Well, if not daily, it certainly does mean, I think, much more than just once a week on a Sunday morning at church, doesn't it?

Hebrews is full of commands not to neglect regular meeting together with God's people in Christian fellowship. We need it. If you're not in some kind of regular fellowship with others who will remind you of the word of God and mutually encourage you and keep you accountable, according to the scriptures, you're in grave danger.

It's a warning. Don't think that you're above the need for God's warnings, friends. We need one another. We need to be listening and we need others to make us listen and keep listening to the voice of God so that we're doing his will and enduring.

[30 : 40] Because if you're not listening, then there's only one thing that's going to be true and that is your heart's going to be hardening. And that will lead you in the end to turn away from the living God and from life itself.

Look at verse 19. Exclusion from his rest, ruinous drift and disobedience and defiance and rebellion begins in the heart, but he says here it ends in hell.

That's what he's saying. That's what he's speaking about here, to the Christian church, to the household of God. Verse 11 here in verse 19 are not just speaking about exclusion from the land of Israel, but about exclusion from life itself.

That's what he makes clear now in chapter 4, verses 1 to 11, where he turns his focus from that exclusion to the prize of entrance, to the real prize of God's promise to his household in Christ.

Verses 1 to 11 are speaking about the true hope of eternal rest, which has always been God's promise. Verse 9, there remains a Sabbath rest, a great Sabbath celebration for the people of God in the future.

[31 : 54] Verse 1 of chapter 4, the promise of entering God's rest still stands. What a great encouragement that is. That generation was excluded and we must rightly fear unless we emulate them.

But, verse 2, do you see the same good news, the same gospel has come to us as came to them. And indeed it comes to every generation.

The promise of God still stands. That's the first mention, by the way, of promise here in Hebrews, a very important word. But what is this rest then that was promised by God and that still is promised by God to us?

Well, in verses 1 to 11 we have two paragraphs that explain it. Each of them has a quote from Psalm 95 at the center. First of all, verses 1 to 5 make very plain the eternal character of that rest of God.

The eternal character. That's what he's been talking about. Verse 2, it's the same gospel, the same good news that comes to us that came to them. It's a gospel that calls for faith, he says.

[32 : 59] Verse 2, first mention of faith, by the way, also, very important in Hebrews. Repeated in verse 3, it's we who have believed who enter that rest.

The rest that the psalm is speaking about, which notice he says, is my rest, verse 3, God's rest. Again in verse 5. Verse 4 makes it plain, it was the rest that God himself entered into in the eternal world, in the as yet unseen world, when he finished his creating work in this world.

A rest obviously then that long predated the land of Israel and the people of Israel. And in those former days, you see, in the days of Moses and the people, then the land of rest, the land of promise was exactly that.

It promised, it prophesied, it foreshadowed the eternal rest. The land of Israel was never the fulfillment of God's promise. That's why in chapter 11 we're told very plainly, Abraham and all the patriarchs, when God called them, they knew they were promised a heavenly country, a heavenly city, much, much more than just an earthly land.

That's why it was called the land of promise. It wasn't called the land of fulfillment. No, God's rest has always had an eternal character. It's a heavenly call.

[34 : 16] And therefore, you see, verses 6 to 11 tell us that that rest and entry to that rest is an ever-present challenge for every single generation. The wilderness generation failed through their own disobedience, and they were excluded from not only the land, but from God's eternal rest.

But the same challenge has faced every generation of God's people since, to believe and to obey and to enter that eternal rest, which is the real prize and always has been the real prize of his gospel promise.

So in verse 7, you see, in David's day, all those years later, the psalm spoke directly to them, don't harden your hearts, you have to trust and obey to receive the prize.

Obviously, verse 8, you see, that wouldn't make any sense at all, would it, if Joshua, the earthly land that he brought them into, was the end goal. No, Joshua would have finished the job long ago.

Of course, in David's time, the kingdom filled the land far more than ever before, but no, even at the zenith of David and Solomon's reign, the best by far was yet to be.

[35 : 27] It was in the future, and they knew it, and they longed for it. There was still a heavenly country, a heavenly city to come, the true heavenly rest God had always promised. That's why Israel didn't stop observing the Sabbath day of rest when they entered the actual land of rest, as if the earthly thing was now fulfilled, so they didn't need the Sabbath day.

No, far from it, because the Sabbath day reminded them that there was more still to come. The fulfillment of everything, the day of rest and even the land of rest was pointing forward to.

It pointed them to God's eternal rest. And that, says verse 9, you see, still lies ahead of us. There remains still in the future a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

The word there for Sabbath rest, it's a one-off in the New Testament, and the scholars tell us it means a joyful celebration celebration of God's Sabbath. And what a joyful celebration that will be.

Because verse 10, look, whoever has entered then, God's rest has rested from his works, as God did from his. When for all of us who have loved and served Christ, at last, for us, we'll be able to sing, the strife is o'er, the battle won, the victory of life is won, the song of triumph has begun.

[36 : 48] Hallelujah. That's the real prize of God's promise, all through the ages, from the very beginning, to God's household in Christ. The joyous celebration of his eternal Sabbath rest in the world to come, the world restored, the new creation.

But that's still ahead of us. It's not something we possess yet in this world, at least certainly not in its fullness. We've tasted the power of the age to come, and we share now in the Holy Spirit.

We have all of that, yes, but, rather like Israel of old, when they began to enter the land and experience its benefits, it was just the beginning.

There were many battles, many struggles that still lay ahead. And for us now, there is not yet perpetual rest, is there? In fact, look at verse 11, what there is is perpetual labor to strive to enter that rest so that none of us will fall by the same sort of disobedience.

because, remember, we share in Christ and all that's to be revealed when he comes, if we indeed hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[38 : 00] Real faith, you see, is always striving forwards and not looking backwards because we're not yet at rest. We still have work to do.

We still have our labors ahead of us. But, you see, the work that we are still engaged in is the work of faith. You could say it's the fight for faith.

It's the battle for our hearts so that our hearts will not be hijacked and hardened by this world, but rather we'll go on hearing and being humbled by God's word. And that's the final message you see in verses 11 to 14 here.

You see, it tells us the path to endurance, the real path of perseverance as God's household in Christ. Verses 11 to 14 here tell us clearly that we'll only stay on that path if we remain true hearers of God's enduring revelation.

For the word of God is living and active. It's discerning the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. Verse 12. That's why the whole repeated refrain of the whole passage is today if you hear his voice don't harden your hearts.

[39 : 12] Be hearers who are humbled by God's words. Don't be hijacked and hardened by this world. Because of course the cry of this world is so very strong. The Israelites in the desert heard the cry of the world and they wanted to go back to the world that they've been rescued from.

Because the pool, the lure of those passing pleasures seemed so attractive to them. It was the same for the people that the writer here is writing to in the first century as Christians. It was hard to live for Christ alone in a world of persecution.

And it's hard for Christians today when this world lures us with its many fleeting pleasures, with its friendships, with its praise, with its acceptance, with its delights.

Or at least the Israelites wanted to see the full blessing of God's rest there and then, without any more battles, without any more struggling onwards. They wanted the future now, in the present.

They wanted the invisible visible here, now, today. And there are many Christians today, friends, who live with that desire, wanting to see the glory of the kingdom of God here and now.

[40 : 26] For some people, that is the splendor of organized religion. As no doubt, it was a lure for these first century Christians. The temple, the priests, the sacrifices, the splendor.

Why do you think it is that people very often drift towards the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Rome, with its great cathedrals, with its temples, with its altars, with its priests, with its sacrifices of the Mass, with its penances, with its things that you can see and touch and be awed by?

For others, it is very different from that. They want to see the glory of prosperity and beauty and fulfillment now.

And they are lured to the grand prosperity churches, where they can see pastors zooming around in private jets and dripping in gold. So the kingdom of glory is here now for the taking. More often, perhaps, it is just those who want that assured feeling now in their hearts, in their emotional experience, and the sensuality of what you feel or are made to feel through certain kinds of worship music or whatever.

Feeling close to God, feeling that assurance. See, all of these different things are just different versions of the religion and spirituality of this world.

[41 : 44] It's focused on what's visible and audible and palpable now, here. Sensuous spirituality, very seductive, very attractive indeed. But the Christian gospel is not about the religion and spirituality of this world.

It's about rescue from this world for the world to come. And these are about false spiritualities and they will deceive our sinful hearts, which are so easily deceived, to seek satisfaction in false sensuality, in worldly appetites.

Things that easily sap and sideline our spiritual appetites, and if unchecked by the word of God, will lead us back into this world's morality. And that's such a stumbling block, isn't it, for many Christians today.

So how are we going to strive, verse 11, and not fall back and stumble? How are we going to hold fast, verse 14, to that confession, to the very end?

Well, the answer's right there in the middle two verses, isn't it? Only by listening to the word of God. That's the ever-present powerful weapon that God has given us to help us, the double-edged sword.

[43 : 01] Verse 13, you see, it's the word of God that will keep our eyes fixed on the future and on the world to come and on the judgment to come and reminds us all the time that with God there aren't any secrets. That we're exposed to him now, even as then we'll be exposed publicly to all.

And it's the same word of God now, verse 12, you see, that cuts right to our hearts, that tells us what God really thinks of us and what God really wants of us. And that word alone will humble us and keep humbling us and keep us therefore looking to the Savior of verse 14, who already has passed through the heavens, who's shown us the way and the only way to that ultimate rest.

It's by listening only to the word of God that we'll be kept looking only to the Son of God. And in him alone is our hope to be found.

See, on Judgment Day, all the world at last will see the truth about this world and the truth about the world to come. And they'll see that all that is of this world's treasures are just empty and void and disappearing.

And only God's true rest has ever been of any value at all. But by then it's too late. But we have the word of God now.

[44 : 21] We have the word which alone can pierce the fog, pierce the confusion, can judge these realities now and can lead us clearly day by day to his ultimate kingdom.

Not to be those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to be those who endure and are saved. That's what Hebrews is calling us to. And that's friends, why the life of the church must be rooted in and must be always centered on the expository preaching and teaching of the word of God.

Only that can keep a church on the rails. And only that can keep us on the road to salvation, you and me. Where that's not so, how on earth will believers be equipped to exhort one another constantly so that they're not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

But that's what we see, isn't it? And so many Christian churches today just become effectively unbelieving because in reality their gospel is just all about finding meaning in this world, in this world's concerns, in this world's fashions and fads, not in God's eternal world.

But we have a great high priest, says verse 14, who has passed through the heavens into the glory of the world to come. We have Jesus, the Son of God, and we share in that heavenly calling.

[45 : 51] So let's hold fast to our confession, because we share Christ if indeed we hold fast our original confession to the end. and we'll do that, he says, if we keep exhorting one another today and every day to keep looking to the Son of God by keeping listening to the Word of God.

That's got to be our message, you and I, to one another all the days of our lives, if we're going to be faithful friends and brothers and sisters. Keep exhorting one another, keep saying to one another, take care.

Remember, only a hearing faith holds fast, so hold fast, and you follow Jesus, and I'll follow Jesus, and we will all follow Jesus together.

Let's pray. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Blessed Lord, who has caused all scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patient endurance and the comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.