Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 5

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Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews

LESSON V

CHRIST IS "BETTER THAN" MOSES AND JOSHUA

Hebrews 3:1—4:16

OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST CAN AND WILL LEAD US INTO THE REST OF GOD

Chapters three and four of the Epistle to the Hebrews are one long parenthesis, and bring to an end the introductory portion of the book. We are not to think of them as separate chapters, but as a unit. In a former lesson we saw that chapters one and two might be considered as two foundation pillars to the great superstructure of the epistle, proving that the eternal deity of the Son of God and His sinless humanity qualify Him to be our Great High Priest. Chapter one, we have seen, establishes beyond controversy that the Lord Jesus always was the eternal God; chapter two, that He “suffered being tempted,” and is, therefore, able to “lead many sons unto glory.” Now these two chapters also form a unit, and end in the climax of 2:17, 18, the first reference to the High Priestly work of Christ to be found in the epistle. Chapter three continues this main theme in verse one, saying,

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus” (R. V.).

It seems as though the Holy Spirit began to enlarge upon the central theme of the epistle the High Priestly work of Christ then paused for the long parenthesis of chapters three and four. These two chapters are concluded with another climax, 4:14-16, which is the second reference in the epistle to the central theme. Thus 5:1 10:18 form the “chief point” of the book of Hebrews; whereas all that precedes is introductory; and all that follows is practical, hortatory, and intended to encourage, warn, and comfort.

Our lesson for today is the consideration of chapters three and four. In proving that our Lord Jesus is "better
than” Moses and Joshua, they prove also that He can and will lead us into the rest of God because He is our “merciful and faithful high priest.” This One who is “better than” the prophets, and “better than” the holy angels, is able and eager to lead us into the rest of God. Moses was not able to lead Israel into the Canaan rest because of Israel’s unbelief. Joshua did lead his people into the promised land; and yet four hundred years later God spoke, through David, of “another day” of rest which “remaineth” to “the people of God.” The Canaan rest, therefore, and the creation rest were only types of God’s real rest, into which our Great High Priest can and will lead all who put their faith in Him. This, in brief, is the message of the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews. Now let us look at the verses in some detail.

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus.”

The word “wherefore” links what is to follow with chapters one and two. We hardly need repeat here what we have sought to set forth in our former studies; yet we can not emphasize the truth too much—that only the God-Man, even Jesus, the Son of God, is able to be a perfect Priest. Only the sinless, eternal Son of God and Son of Man was able to offer a perfect sacrifice for sin; only He is able to intercede for His blood-bought “sons” and lead them on to glory. I do trust, my dear friend, that you will not let anyone cause you to believe that death is not real, or that our Lord died as a martyr, or that He did not die vicariously, the only perfect Substitute for the sinner! Do not let anyone rob you of the meaning of the finished work of Christ on Calvary! Do not let anyone cause you to doubt the words of the Holy Spirit, recorded in Phil. 2:5-8, which set forth in brief the message of the first two chapters of Hebrews. The Lord Jesus, always equal with the father, “humbled himself” to die on the shameful cross. The Creator of angels took the place lower than the angels for thirty-three years, in order to lead His redeemed to glory, to a position of honor as “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.” Do you not see, my friend, that because the Son of God was willing to become Man and die, therefore He is able to be our Great High Priest? “Wherefore . . . consider” Him!

“Consider the Apostle and High Priest of Our Confession, Even Jesus!”

Meditate upon the glory of His Person and the sufficiency of His work! Think not so much of His gifts as of Him! You are a partaker of “a heavenly calling,” if you have put your faith in Him. “Wherefore . . . consider” the majesty and beauty of His Person and the marvels of His work on your behalf. The psalmist wrote, saying, “My meditation of him shall be sweet.” And, my dear friend, if you will take even a little time out every morning with His blessed Book and do what God here exhorts you to do, your meditation, too, will be sweet. Consider Him, not only as the suffering Saviour on Calvary’s Cross; but consider Him also as “the Apostle and High Priest” of your confession, seated now at the right hand of the Father, ever living to make intercession for you, upholding, strengthening, comforting, guiding, chastening, forming you into a vessel “meet for the Master’s use.” Too many of our daily meditations are not sweet; but if we train our minds to meditate upon Christ, then the Holy Spirit will unfold to us the reasons why He is the “One altogether lovely.”

Our Lord is called the “Apostle” here and here only in all the Word of God; yet throughout His teaching, when He was upon earth, He told His disciples that He was the One “sent down from heaven.” And an apostle is “one sent,” sent with a message. As the One sent down from the Father, Christ came to reveal the Father, to give us the Father’s message of eternal salvation. Indeed, in the opening words of this epistle we read that God spoke to the world in His Son, the living and eternal Word.

The twelve apostles of our Lord, qualified to be apostles because they had seen the risen Christ, went out over the earth in their day, bearing witness to Him whom they had seen and heard. Their teaching bore the stamp of divine authority because they spoke and wrote what the crucified and risen Lord told them to speak and write. Paul, likewise, as one “born out of due time,” wrote and preached of
the living Lord, whom he saw on the Damascus road, again in the temple, and on other occasions when God revealed Himself to this apostle to the Gentiles. The apostles, therefore, were those sent by the Son of God to give His message to a world in sin. After He arose from the dead, He said unto them,

“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

Yes; He was the One sent down from heaven to tell the world that God loves the sinner, that He died to save the sinner’s soul.

Not only is our Lord the “Apostle” of our “confession,” but He is also our “High Priest,” and as such the Holy Spirit bids us consider Him. Even as He was the One sent from God, so also He represents man to God. And does this twofold truth not remind us that chapter one of this epistle tells us of our “Apostle,” sent from the Father; chapter two, of our “High Priest,” offering a perfect sacrifice for us, representing us to the Father? How unsearchable is the wisdom of God! How wonderful is His inspired Book! When our Lord was here upon earth as the sent One, He was the Apostle; and now at the right hand of the Father, having finished His redemptive work when He offered Himself upon the altar of Calvary, He pleads our cause before “the throne of grace.” That is His ministry as our Priest. Moreover, we have confessed Him as our Apostle and High Priest, if we have told the world that we believe in His redeeming work on the cross. Now we are to “consider” Him—the eternal Son sent down from heaven; the ever-living Great High Priest, ministering for us now in all His limitless power.

In our last lesson we read the words, “We see Jesus”—suffering, dying, risen, exalted. And let me tell you, my friend, if you do not “see Jesus” by faith now, seated at the place of power, waiting to return to take His rightful throne, then you do not see a solution to the problems of this sin-weary, war-torn world. If the Lord tarries, we hope for a peace following this second world war that shall give men their liberties; but from God’s own Word we know that it will not be a permanent peace. Men talk of making

this the last war; but then they said the first world war was “the war to end wars.” Each passing century finds its turmoil and war and strife; and there is no solution to the world’s problems apart from the return of the Prince of Peace. Do you see Him, my friend? Do you see Him, by faith? Do you see Him as the “Apostle and High Priest” of your confession? Then consider Him in all the love and power that these two beautiful names suggest!

CHRIST IS "BETTER THAN" MOSES

In Heb. 3:2-6 the Holy Spirit sets forth another of the striking contrasts of the epistle, proving that Christ is “worthy of more glory” than was Moses. Now of all the Old Testament characters Moses was doubtless the greatest leader, law-giver, and prophet. The Hebrews rightly honored his name, and pondered upon his God-given words. Yet here in the Epistle to the Hebrews the Holy Spirit proved beyond question that Christ Jesus is “better than” the very best that Judaism could offer. And in so doing, He was urging the Hebrew Christians to withstand persecution, even bitter trial; and to “go on with Christ” to a deeper, fuller understanding of His finished work and present ministry for His own yea, of His future glory.

Two facts are emphasized in verses two and three: (1) Our Lord’s faithfulness; and (2) His glory. Let us read the words of the text:

“Christ Jesus ... was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his (i.e., God’s) house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses ...”

Jehovah bore witness to the faithfulness of Moses in a wonderful statement, recorded in Numbers 12:7. Miriam and Aaron had murmured against Moses because he had married an Ethiopian woman; and they accused him of taking too much upon himself in leading God’s people. But God said that “Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). Then God appeared at the tabernacle, called Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and said:
"Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed" (Num. 12:6-9).

Then it was that Miriam became "leprous, white as snow," and had to stay without the camp of Israel until God healed her and until her ceremonial cleansing was accomplished. Evidently only the grace of God kept Aaron from suffering a like chastisement, not that he deserved this grace, but because he was God's anointed priest. No leper could be a priest in Israel.

The Holy Spirit, in Heb. 3:2, was quoting the words which we have just read,

"My servant Moses . . . is faithful in all mine house."

God's "house," over which Moses was faithful, was the tabernacle in the wilderness. How faithful he was, is recorded in the book of Exodus, where we read more than once that he built this sanctuary for God's dwelling place in the midst of His children "according to the pattern" which God had showed him in the mount. Not only so, but he instructed Aaron and his sons, that they might minister there before the Lord as He had commanded them. Yes; Moses was faithful! And every godly Hebrew accepted that fact of history. How weighty, therefore, is the Holy Spirit's argument in the third chapter of Hebrews concerning the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house!"

Before we continue with the argument set forth here by the Holy Spirit, let us pause to note that the Lord Jesus was the "Appointed One" of God. As such, He was faithful to His Father's will. But some dare to claim that this appointment by the Father robs Him of His deity. No; not by any means! The Son of God was always co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. Then of His own volition He planned to become obedient to His Father's will, when He became a Man "for the suffering of death." This is the sense in which He was "appointed" by the Father to do a work upon earth, to go to the cross, to suffer and die for sinners. Having fulfilled this work, He cried out in triumph, "It is finished!" Had He not said, in His prayer of intercession, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, that He had "finished the work" which His Father had given Him to do? Then He committed His spirit into His Father's hands. Those who loved Him buried Him; but the Father reached down and raised Him from the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand.

It was the Man, Christ Jesus, appointed by the Father, who said after His resurrection,

"All power is given unto me . . . " (Matt. 28:18).

As the eternal God, He always had that power; but as the God-Man, He received all power from His Father who had appointed Him to His redemptive work. Moreover, God has "appointed a day" when the Lord Jesus will judge the world (Acts 17:31).

Meanwhile, He is at the Father's appointed place of power, to plead our cause before the court of heaven. When Satan accuses us to the Father, as we all too often give him opportunity to do, the Son of God, our Great High Priest, is our "Advocate with the Father." His wounded hands and feet and side bear eloquent testimony to the sufficiency of His ministry at the throne of grace.

This Appointed One is faithful—a "merciful and faithful high priest," faithful to the Father who appointed Him, faithful to His redeemed who trust Him by His grace.

Surely the eternal God is "worthy of more glory than Moses"! Surely that point needs no argument! But let us note the words of the text:

"For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some
man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his (God's) house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:3-6).

Two striking contrasts are set forth here: (1) Moses was a servant; Christ is the Son, Creator, Builder; (2) Moses was a servant in God’s house, which was the tabernacle; Christ is the Son over His own house! Therefore, Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses! It is a logical conclusion, as well as an eternal truth!

Both the universe and the church are in view here. Christ is the Builder, or Creator of the vast universe; and He is the One who creates within the sinner a new heart by the power of His own Holy Spirit. The universe is in view; for verse 4 says plainly,

“... he that built all things is God.”

And the church is in view; for verse 6 explains,

“... Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we...”

The Lord Jesus is the Creator of all the universe; and “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). As born-again believers in Christ Jesus, we are members of the “household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

It is true that our Lord Jesus “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He washed the disciples’ feet. He said unto them, “I am among you as he that serveth” (Luke 22:27). As the faithful Servant of Jehovah, He was greater than Moses, who was “a servant” in God’s house. But in Hebrews, the contrast is even more striking; for here we see Christ, “the Son of God,” compared with Moses, the “servant” of God. And surely the Son in His own house is worthy of more honor than is the servant in another’s house.

“Every house is builded by some man,” the Holy Spirit says in this passage. This is an accepted truth; and yet there are those who say that there is no Creator, no God! The same atheist, while denying the existence of a Creator of the vast universe, looks at a house built by man and admits that the structure represents the work of an architect. What would you think, my friend, of a man who said that the beautiful post office building of Los Angeles just came into being by chance? Yet it is by far more foolish for a man to say that all the whirling planets came into existence apart from the work of the Creator of all things. And that Creator is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, even if “the fool” does say “in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 53:1).

Now Moses was faithful in God’s house, the Jewish tabernacle; and in our former studies we have seen abundant proof that this sanctuary in the wilderness was a type of Christ and the church, which is the mystical household of faith. The cross of Christ is the altar, of which the brazen altar in the tabernacle spoke. He is our Cleanser, of whom the brazen laver was but a faint picture. He is the Light of the believer’s life, foreshadowed by the golden candlestick. He is the Bread of Life, of whom the shewbread was but a “shadow of good things to come.” He is our Great High Priest, interceding for us, showing His wounds before the throne of grace, even in the Holiest of All, which is heaven itself.

We saw in our studies of the tabernacle that, besides presenting our Lord in His beauty and glory, that sanctuary also foreshadowed the church. The boards, once trees, then severed from the earthly creation, rested upon sockets of silver, taken from the redemption money of the children of Israel. These same boards were covered with pure gold, even as the children of God are to share and behold His glory.

It was not necessary for the Holy Spirit to explain in detail about the Jewish tabernacle; for He was writing to Hebrews, who knew well the Old Testament Scriptures. And how fitting that He should compare Moses and God’s “house” in the wilderness with Christ and the church, to show the incomparable faithfulness and glory of the only Saviour and Lord!

Moses was faithful as a servant in this earthly sanctuary; but Christ is faithful as the eternal Son of God in His own
house, "whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." In other words, if our affiliation with the people of God is an empty profession, then, like the Hebrews in the days of Paul, there is the danger of apostasy, a turning away from the things of Christ. But if ours is a true "confession" of faith in Him, then we shall, indeed, "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

Moreover, there is the need for perseverance in faith; and often our faith is weak because we do not "consider Christ Jesus ... the Apostle and High Priest of our confession." If we trust Him, whatever the circumstance, then He can add His best in blessing and joy and comfort to our faltering hearts. That is what it means to "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope" that is ours in Him "firm unto the end"—unto that day when faith shall become sight, when persevering faith will be fully rewarded in the presence of Him who is the "author and finisher of our faith."

Let me ask you, my Christian friend, have you taken time this morning to "consider" the faithfulness and the glory of our Lord Jesus? He is faithful in "upholding all things" in His vast universe "by the word of his power." He is faithful in His redemptive work—"a faithful and merciful high priest in things pertaining to God," having made propitiation for our sins. (See Heb. 2:17.) He is faithful in His intercessory work, as our Great High Priest, representing us to our Father in heaven, pleading our cause when Satan accuses us for our stumbling, sinful, faltering ways.

If we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself" (II Tim. 2:13, R. V.).

He will continue to be faithful, even until He leads His "many sons unto glory," yea, throughout the endless ages!

And what glory and honor are His! Have you taken time this morning to "consider" that uncreated glory of the Lord Jesus? Have you thanked Him this morning for His forgiving love that guarantees your beholding and sharing that glory for all eternity? May it be the prayer of every one of us who names the name of Christ to say, with the psalmist of old,

"My meditation of him shall be sweet" (Psalm 104:34)!

THE HIGH PRIESTLY WORK OF CHRIST ASSURES THE BELIEVER'S ETERNAL SECURITY

Before we leave these first six verses of this third chapter, let us look once more at the latter part of verse six, "... whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Many listeners to our Bible lessons have written, asking questions concerning this verse and others like it. They inquire: "Does not this passage tell us that we are the Lord's if we hold out until the end? And if we do not hold out, then are we not lost? Have we not lost our salvation?" To such inquirers let me say that, wherever such a warning is found in Scripture, it is written to unbelievers who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but do not "go on" with Him. They have been intellectually convinced that He is the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world; but their hearts have not been regenerated by faith in His finished work of redemption.

Now to prove that this is true in Heb. 3:6, let us read verses 7-13 of this chapter, words immediately following this warning of verse 6. There we see that Paul is addressing Hebrews, whom he calls "brethren." Sometimes, when he uses this term, he has in mind fellow-Christians; but here he is writing to fellow-Hebrews, "brethren" according to the flesh; for, of course, we know that Paul was a Jew. Reminding those Hebrews of the unbelief of their fathers who perished in the wilderness, he warns them not to fall into the same snare of unbelief. Then he repeats the warning of verse six in verse 14, saying,

"We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end."

We must ever bear in mind that many Hebrews living in the days of Paul professed Christianity when they saw
the miracles of Christ and His apostles; yet were never born again. When they saw our Lord's mighty works, when they heard of His resurrection from the dead, when they witnessed the miracle of the Day of Pentecost, when they saw Peter and John heal the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple - when they saw or heard about these and many similar miracles, they joined themselves, for a time, with the disciples. Then persecution followed; instead of being honored by their nation, the Christian Jews were thrown into prison or beheaded or called "the off-scouring of the earth." Stephen was stoned; whereupon many professed followers of Christ turned back to the ritual of Judaism. Not willing to "suffer affliction with the people of God," they offered their lambs upon the Jewish altar, denying the Lamb of God who had come to fulfill all the Old Testament types and shadows. Steeped in unbelief, they returned to Judaism. And it was to offset such apostasy that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Now the many and searching warnings of this epistle culminate in that one recorded in Heb. 10:39. Let us turn to it and read it just here:

"But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

What was wrong with those who turned back unto perdition? They did not believe "unto salvation." Moreover, Paul was addressing Hebrew Christians in Heb. 10:39, assuring them that their eternal security was certain just because they had believed "unto salvation," contrasting their saving faith with the empty profession of apostate Jews, who had returned to Judaism.

There are two kinds of "belief" - a head-knowledge and a heart-knowledge. If the Hebrews Paul had in mind in Heb. 10:39 had believed "unto salvation," they would not have gone back "unto perdition." John said of such as these,

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us;

but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us" (I John 2:19, R. V.).

Those of whom John wrote were going back to the godless world; those of whom Paul wrote were returning to Judaism; in both cases, they were turning their backs upon the Lord Jesus Christ, proving that they had never been born again by faith in His shed blood. And that is the reason why many in our own day "backslide." Many churches today are filled with those who have joined the church on the crest of a revival, because of an emotional appeal; yet they were not clear on the simple plan of salvation. Then temptation came, and they were swept away by the tide of worldliness and sin. If they had been regenerated, they would have gone on with the Lord.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon told the story of a drunkard who, in one of his evangelistic services, professed faith in Christ. The next day, a man said to the minister of the Gospel, "Mr. Spurgeon, there is one of your converts in the gutter," to which the man of God replied, "Yes; I can see that he is one of my converts; if he were the Lord's, he would not be there!" Even so today hundreds of so-called Protestants are leaving fundamental Christianity to enter all kinds of cults and "isms" which deny the deity of our Lord and His atoning work on the cross. Why? Because they were mere professors, not true possessors of a saving faith. Our Lord Himself forever settled the question of eternal security when He said,

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

This is what the Holy Spirit meant by the warning of Heb. 3:6, reiterated in 3:14. And now let us look more carefully at the verses which follow this contrast between Moses and Christ, the Son of God.
FURTHER WARNING AGAINST UNBELIEF

Still thinking of Moses and of Christ's superiority to the ministry of this faithful servant in God's house, the Holy Spirit, in the verses which follow 1-6, utters a searching warning to the Hebrews of Paul's day, as well as to Jews and Gentiles of all time. As we continue our reading of this passage, let us note that this warning is made the more emphatic by these illustrations:

1. By the quotation from Psalm 95:7-11, which the Hebrews accepted as divinely inspired (Heb. 3:7-11).
2. By the danger of apostasy in Paul's day (Heb. 3:12-15).
3. By the example of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness (Heb. 3:16—4:3a).

This warning against unbelief is followed by a contrast, in Heb. 4:3b-10, between God's rest and the two-fold rest, with which Israel was familiar; namely, God's creation rest and the Canaan rest, into which Joshua led God's people. Following this comparison, is another exhortation to the people of God to enter by faith into His rest (Heb. 4:11). And the long parenthesis closes with two searching and comforting statements concerning the living, eternal Word of God (4:12, 13), and concerning Christ, our Great High Priest, who can and will lead us into the rest of God because He is "better than" Moses and Joshua and all that Judaism had to offer (4:14-16).

Thus we have sought to outline the remainder of this parenthetical portion of the epistle, which is our lesson for today, before proceeding with the discussion of the verses in some detail. We have sought to outline it simply and briefly because many casual readers consider it a difficult passage. In reality it is not difficult at all; on the contrary, it is convincing and clear to those who are familiar with the Old Testament references with which it has to do. We shall find, however, that the translation of the Revised Version does clarify the passage in several places. And now let us go back to the warning of the Holy Spirit as quoted from the ninety-fifth Psalm.

1. The Warning of Psalm 95:7-11. Now David wrote

the ninety-fifth Psalm, as Heb. 4:7 plainly states; yet Heb. 3:7 also plainly states that the Holy Spirit wrote that Psalm. What a clear mark of inspiration of the Scriptures by the Spirit of God! The Holy Spirit wrote through the pen of David, even as He spoke through all the "holy men" of old who were "moved" by Him to write the sacred Word of God. (See II Peter 1:21.) And now let us read Psalm 95:7-11 from the Revised Version, as it is quoted in Heb. 3:7-11:

"Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith,
Today if ye shall hear his voice,
Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation,
Like as in the day of the trial in the wilderness,
Where (or 'wherewith') your fathers tried me by proving me,
And saw my works forty years.
Wherefore I was displeased with this generation,
And said, They do always err in their heart:
But they did not know my ways;
As (or 'so') I sware in my wrath,
They shall not enter into my rest."

The Hebrews, to whom Paul was writing this epistle, well knew the story referred to in the ninety-fifth Psalm; therefore, there was no need for further explanation of the details. Indeed, their own Old Testament is literally filled with references to Israel's unbelief in the wilderness. It was a sad story. God had worked mighty miracles in Egypt and through the Red Sea for His redeemed people. He had fed them with manna; He had given them water from the smitten rock. He had led them in the Shekinah Glory, in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. He had given them His holy law from Mount Sinai; He had pardoned their sin when they broke that holy law. He had given them the beautiful tabernacle and the priesthood, with all their "shadows of good things to come" in Christ Jesus. And then He led them to Kadesh-barnea, to the very entrance to the promised land. He told Moses to send twelve spies into the land; they stayed there forty days, and then returned to Israel's camp. Only Caleb and Joshua brought back a good report; the other ten put fear into the heart of Israel, say-
ing that the cities were walled, that there were giants in the land, and that they could not go in to possess it. Caleb and Joshua reasoned with the people, who began to weep, to murmur against Moses and against God. Caleb and Joshua exhorted Israel to trust God for the needed strength to go in to possess the land of promise, whereupon the people sought to stone them. It is a sad story one of unbelief and ingratitude and sin. Only the faith of Caleb and Joshua brightens the picture! Wherefore God sent Israel back by the way of the Red Sea, to wander forty years - a year for each day the spies were in the land. Every man who was twenty years old when he left Egypt died during the forty years' wandering, except Caleb and Joshua; then God led their children into Canaan under the guidance of Joshua, after the unbelieving fathers' carcasses had fallen in the wilderness.

It was a searching warning which the Holy Spirit applied to the Hebrews in the days of Paul; and Israel's unbelief in the wilderness presented a striking parallel with the circumstances in which the Hebrews in the days of Paul found themselves. Let us compare these two periods in Jewish history:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Israel in the Wilderness</th>
<th>Hebrews in the Days of Paul</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Delivered from bondage in Egypt</td>
<td>Delivered from the bondage of Judaism.</td>
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<td>(2) Started out with high hopes</td>
<td>Professed Christianity with zeal.</td>
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<td>(3) Sought to return to Egypt</td>
<td>In danger of returning to Judaism. (The temple worship was still being continued.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Perished in the wilderness</td>
<td>Would be lost if they persisted in unbelief, after they had been enlightened, but not regenerated.</td>
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It was a faithful warning which the Holy Spirit gave to the Hebrews living in the days of Paul; and it is a faithful warning to all men in every age. To Christians weak in faith God calls for trust in Him, for an ever-increasing realization of the blessedness of the rest of God. To enlightened, but unregenerated souls God is pleading still,

"Today if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts."

2. The Danger of Apostasy in Paul's Day, Heb. 3:12-15. If we can put ourselves in the place of the Hebrews of the early part of the Christian era, perhaps we shall better understand the full significance of the Holy Spirit's application of this warning to those living in the days of Paul. As we have observed, the temple was still standing; Christian Jews were called traitors to their nation in forsaking the worship of Judaism. They were in danger of bitter persecution, even to the confiscation of property, and even to the forfeiting of life itself. It was to encourage the faltering Christian of that time, as well as to warn the Jew who was intellectually convinced that Christ was his Messiah, yet who had not boldly professed faith in Him— it was for this two-fold purpose that the Spirit of God made the application, as recorded in Heb. 3:12-15. Again, we quote the words from the Revised Version:

"Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God; but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; for we are become partakers of (or 'with') Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end: while it is said, Today if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."

Twice the warning is made very personal, as in the words, "any one of you." And again, the words of the psalmist are reiterated for the sake of emphasis. "An evil heart of unbelief" is dishonoring to God and dangerous for the sinner, and leads to a heart hardened by "the deceitfulness of sin." Once more we are reminded of the words of Heb. 3:6, that, "if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end," we shall bear witness before the world of a saving faith, not of a mere, empty profession.

3. The Example of Israel's Unbelief in the Wilderness, Heb. 3:16—4:3a. As if to drive home the forcefulness of
the illustration from the ninety-fifth Psalm, as if to make sure that the Hebrew Christians benefited from the sad experiences of Israel in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit continued to make the application, in Heb. 3:16 4:3a. Let us read these words:

“For who, when they heard, did provoke? nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was he displeased forty years? was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief. Let us fear, therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it, for indeed we have had good tidings preached unto us, even as also they; but the word of hearing did not profit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard. For we who have believed do enter into that rest; even as he hath said, As (or ‘so’) I sware in my wrath,

They shall not enter into my rest...”

As we turn to the story of Israel’s sin in the days of Moses, we read where God said that they had “provoked” Him “ten times” (Num. 14:22), not hearkening unto His voice; and countless times thereafter the nation disobeyed the Lord. Little wonder the passage before us in Hebrews speaks of how they “provoked” and “displeased” God; how they “sinned” through “unbelief” and “disobedience” in not heeding “the gospel.” Oh, that God’s people in every age would profit from this lesson!

It is wonderful to note that the Holy Spirit here tells us that Israel in Moses’ day heard “the gospel,” the “good tidings” of a Saviour to come! That is what we have been learning for many months and years, from the Books of Moses how the Jewish passover; indeed, all the feasts of Jehovah; the animal sacrifices; the tabernacle worship; the priesthood and these and countless lessons from the Old Testament “preach the gospel” in shadow and in object lesson and in type. Later in Hebrews the Holy Spirit tells us that Moses esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:26); and Moses lived some fifteen hundred years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. Like Abraham, Moses “saw the day of Christ” by faith! And Paul told the Galatian Christians that God “preached the gospel unto Abraham” when He said, “In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8).

Later in this lesson we want to consider more fully what God means in the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews by the words, “My rest.” It is a wonderful study! But just now let us note only how often the expression occurs, sometimes referred to by Paul as “His rest.” And let us note that entrance into the rest of God is by faith. Israel in the wilderness did not enter into the Canaan rest because of unbelief; but the Canaan rest was only a type of God’s rest.

**FAITH VERSUS UNBELIEF**

As we have read these verses, illustrating the danger of apostasy by Israel’s unbelief in the wilderness, we must surely have been impressed with the repeated reference to “faith” and to “unbelief.” Israel’s unbelief kept her out of the Canaan rest; and only unbelief will keep a sinner out of heaven. Faith alone will save the sinner’s soul; and unbelief alone will lead him to a Christ-less grave. Moreover, the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, that moment we enter into the rest of God. As we shall see later in this lesson, the Holy Spirit is not talking about heaven’s rest here in the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews. There will, indeed, be rest in heaven rest from sin and sickness and sorrow and death. But here the Holy Spirit is seeking to show us that, once we believe in Christ, we enter by faith into God’s rest rest of heart, rest from the futile struggle to make ourselves fit for heaven, rest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I do trust, my dear friends, that you are at rest this morning. Long prayers and ordinances and rituals will not give you that rest; but faith in the shed blood of the Saviour will give you rest of heart that will take you through the bitter trials and sorrows of this earthly life. Even memorizing the Word of God will not give rest unless the reading of the Word is mixed with faith. Believing it will give rest.
The world started on its downward course by disbelieving God. In the Garden of Eden the devil instilled doubt in the minds and hearts of our first parents, and the human race fell in Adam. Now man is born in unbelief, and it is natural for the unsaved man to doubt God; for faith is transplanted down here from another realm. Unbelief belongs to this world; faith belongs to the world of eternal things. The world's history began in unbelief, and that is why there is so much confusion everywhere today because men do not believe God and His precious promises.

Faith is the great lesson of the Bible—not personal holiness, not personal goodness, not personal culture. God wants us to be like His Son so much that He will make us conformed to the image of His Son if we believe His Word. But the chief lesson of the Bible is faith in God. The great faith chapter of the Bible is the eleventh of Hebrews. As we read it, we are impressed by the fact that the heroes and heroines of faith listed there are not mentioned because of any righteous deeds of their own, but because of their great faith. Jacob is in the number, and what did he ever do to win renown? Rahab is there, and called "the harlot," but Rahab believed in Israel's God. Abraham is mentioned there because he "believed God." Noah is there because he also believed God and built the ark when, as yet, there was no sign of a flood. Abel is there because, by faith, he brought a lamb, graphic picture of the Lamb of God who was to come, in whom Abel believed. Go down the list, my friend, and you will see the faith of these Old Testament characters, not their works, entitled them to eternal life and mention in the "Westminster Abbey" of the Bible.

It is tragic to find that countless hundreds today are trusting in the vain hope of working for their salvation. When I was a pastor in Texas, I preached one Lord's Day morning on the quotation from Eph. 2:8, 9.

"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." As I walked home, I decided to speak to the first ten people I met who, I was convinced, were going home from the morning worship service of several churches near my own. With each one of these ten I carried on a conversation something like this:

"My dear friend, have you been to church?"
"Yes."
"Did you have a good worship service?"
"Oh yes."
"Are you a Christian?"
"Yes."
"And what is it that makes you a Christian, that gives you salvation?"

Every one of the ten began at once to tell me what he or she was doing—trying to live right; being honest, kind, and unselfish; living a moral life; praying; doing the best he or she could. Not one said simply and with conviction, "I know that Christ died for my sins and rose again for my justification." Truly "such things ought not so to be!" God means for us to be able to "give a reason for the hope that is within us." And that is the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews—to teach the lesson of faith.

All God asked of Israel in the days of Moses was that they believe His Word. Seven times in one short message to Moses He said, "I will." Turn to Exod. 6:6-8 for His promise, spoken before the nation was delivered from bondage:

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."
"I will rid you out of their bondage."
"I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments."
"I will take you to me for a people."
"I will be to you a God."
"I will bring you into the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."
"I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord."

There was not a single condition. Israel had only to believe God. He led them out of Egypt with a mighty hand; He guided them through the Red Sea on dry land. They should have marched through the wilderness in a few days;
but unbelief caused them to accuse Moses—yea, even God—of leading them into the wilderness to die. They sought to return to Egypt for the leeks and onions and cucumbers and melons and garlic! They longed for the flesh pots of Egypt! They murmured and feared and died!

And are professing Christians today any different—in the large? Instead of “standing on the promises of God,” we put question marks around them. We ask why the little white casket has to enter our home, why tragedy and sin have to mar our happiness, why sorrow and suffering? We can not say, with Job, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.” My friend, all of that is unbelief. Worry is unbelief; worry is sin! Someone has said that God has put the words, “Fear not,” in the Bible 365 times—one for every day in the year!” May He help us to believe His promise and trust Him for His grace! Trying to trust will not help; trying to be good, trying to be a Christian—these things do not spring from faith. Faith is believing God!

THE REST OF GOD
"BETTER THAN" GOD'S CREATION REST
"BETTER THAN" THE CANAAN REST UNDER JOSHUA

Already in this lesson we have spoken of the repeated references to “God's rest,” also called “His rest.” We have stated that the creation rest and the Canaan rest were but types of the real rest of God. We have said that, in these chapters, the Holy Spirit is not referring to the rest in heaven to the child of God, but that He is talking of the rest that comes to the sinner saved by faith. The portion of the Scripture which we are to read just now touches the very heart of the matter. Let us look at it carefully, as recorded in Heb. 4:3-10:

“For we who have believed do enter into that rest; even as he hath said,

'As (or 'so') I swears in my wrath,
They shall not enter into my rest:
although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he hath said somewhere of the seventh day on this wise. And God rested on the seventh day from all his works; and in this place again, They shall not enter into my rest.”

Do you see, my friend, that here the Holy Spirit speaks first of the unbelief of Israel in not entering the Canaan rest, then of God's rest on the seventh day from the works of creation, then once more of Israel's unbelief in the wilderness? It is as if the Holy Spirit would repeat the warning often enough to strike the message home to unbelieving hearts—in Paul’s day and throughout all time. But let us not fail to note the plain statement, with which verse 3 opens,

“For we who have believed do enter into that rest”—God's rest!

After the death of Moses, and after the death of the unbelieving Jews in the wilderness, Joshua did lead the people into Canaan. Yet even that rest was only a type of God's real rest, because some four-hundred years later, by the mouth of David, God still spoke of His rest as yet to be realized by His believing people. Therefore, Christ, who can and will lead us into God's rest, is “better than” Joshua, another great leader of ancient Israel.

As we continue to read this passage, let us observe that the name “Jesus” in the Authorized Version of verse 8 should be translated “Joshua.” Indeed, “Jesus” is the Greek for the Hebrew name “Joshua,” and means “Saviour” or “Deliverer.” Joshua was Israel's human leader, or deliverer into Canaan; our Lord Jesus is the Deliverer from bondage to sin and death. And now let us read verses 6-8 of chapter four:

"Seeing therefore it remaineth that some should enter thereinto, and they to whom the good tidings were before preached failed to enter in because of disobedience, he again defineth a certain day, To-day, saying in David so long a time afterward (even as hath been said before),

To-day if ye shall hear his voice,
Harden not your hearts.

For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterward of another day.”
Then follow two of the most beautiful and enlightening verses in these two chapters,

"There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest hath himself also rested from his works, as God did from his" (Heb. 4:9, 10).

Could any words be more definite and plain? If we are to enter by faith into God's rest, we must cease from our own "works of righteousness," even as God ceased from His creation work on the seventh day. We must rest in the finished work of Christ for the saving of our souls. It was Augustine who said, "Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee." And in so saying, he touched the heart of the matter, set forth for us in the third and fourth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Now to repeat for emphasis and clearness, let us bear in mind that God tells us in His Word of His creation rest, of the Canaan rest, of the rest of salvation in the finished work of Christ, of the rest of consecration, and of eternal rest in heaven. In the passage before us, God's creation rest and the Canaan rest are presented as types of God's real rest in the finished work of our Lord Jesus. It is the rest of salvation that the Holy Spirit is writing about in the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews. He is not talking of the rest of consecration, or of the rest of heaven, although both are very real and very wonderful.

In six days God created the heaven and earth and all things therein; then "he ceased from his own works." Yet cessation from the work of creation was only the negative side of God's rest; His satisfaction through fellowship with man was His real creation rest. Then sin entered to mar that rest of God; and our Lord Jesus said, when He was upon earth, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Then the eternal Son of God went to Calvary's Cross, and spoke those all-important words, "It is finished!" (See John 19:30.) And from that moment the sin question has been settled forever for everyone who will rest "from his own works, as God did from his." "We who have believed do enter into that rest"—God's rest!

There is a much loved passage of Scripture recorded in Matt. 11:28-30, which speaks to us of the rest of salvation and of the rest of consecration. Verse 28 tells of the rest of salvation, the rest about which the passage before us from Hebrews has to do:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Then follow verses 29, 30, which speak to us of the rest of heart that comes to the consecrated Christian, fully yielded to the will of God for service:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

The Lord Jesus did not say, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary." He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour." He had been rejected by His people, Israel, as their King; He had pronounced judgment upon the wicked cities which had witnessed His mighty works; then He made a personal appeal for individual faith in His redeeming work which He was to accomplish on the cross. These words were spoken to those who were trying to be saved by the keeping of the law of Moses. "All ye that labour" includes also everyone who tries to earn his salvation by his own good works. My friend, you will never get the rest of salvation by working for it; you get it by believing what God has said about the finished work of His beloved Son. "For we who have believed do enter into that rest"—that rest to which the Lord Jesus referred when He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Trying to live up to the rules of the church; observing forms and ceremonies; seeking to be a good husband or father or wife or mother or son or daughter; paying your debts; being kind to your fellow-men—all these "works of righteousness," all this "labour," will not give you rest, my friend. The rest of salvation is a gift, to be received by faith from the Lamb of God, who "taketh away the sin of the world." (See John 1:29.)

Every devout Hebrew, to whom Paul was writing this
The epistle which we are studying, knew the ritual and the ceremony concerning the paschal lamb. Every Hebrew knew that the slaying of the passover lamb was followed by a sabbath of rest. That sabbath, by command of God, was not a day of worship, but a day of enforced rest. Our Lord was crucified on the very day of the passover; indeed, Paul tells us that “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (I Cor. 5:7); and as a result of His shed blood we find rest—by believing in His atonement for our souls. Do you see that the rest, of which the sabbath was a type, follows faith in the shed blood of the Lamb of God? That rest can never, never be earned by a sinful soul. No works of ours are good enough to earn that rest; that is why the Son of God had to die! He had to die, in order to save a ruined, fallen, helpless humanity!

You see, my friend, God rested in a perfect creation, a work which He had done. But you and I have nothing in which to rest; therefore, we must rest in what God accomplished in Christ. In Him we are “a new creation.” In Him alone can we find rest from the burden and penalty of our sins.

Then, having found the rest of salvation, which is the free gift of God's grace, we hear Him bidding us take His yoke upon us for consecrated service. This is the rest that comes by doing the will of God; and it follows the rest of salvation—never leads a soul to the cross. It is the fruit of salvation and a yielded heart and will. The first rest comes by believing; the second rest, by doing God’s work in God’s way. After you have been saved, my friend, God says unto you, “Come into service with me... Follow me, and I will make you to become a fisher of men.” Yes; the second rest means work, but what blessed work! With what rich reward in joy now and souls won for all eternity!

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

That is our Lord’s call to service for the sinner saved by His grace. It makes us think of the oxen yoked together, putting their shoulders to the plough. If two oxen pull together, the going is easier than if they seek to go in separate directions. Oh, that Christians would walk with the Lord, bearing His yoke! How much easier their paths would be for their soul’s rest, the rest of service and consecration! How slow we are to take His yoke upon us! We miss that second rest which comes through yieldedness to His perfect will!

If I may use a personal illustration, perhaps we shall see more clearly the difference between the rest of faith and the rest of consecrated service. From the day in the year 1911 when, as a student in The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, I rested in the truth of Rom. 5:1, I have had no doubt concerning the salvation of my soul. More than thirty years have passed since that truth was driven home to my heart, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Yet, on the other hand, there have been many ups and downs in my Christian experience, more “downs” than “ups.” I have spent many hours in prayer, struggling against yieldedness to the will of God for the tasks set before me. Many of them I was hesitant to undertake; and not until I said to the Lord, “I will accept this work which Thou hast given me to do”—not till then did I find the rest of service in God’s appointed place.

One such occasion I shall never forget. It was just prior to my coming to Los Angeles to minister in the Church of the Open Door and the Bible Institute here. I was pastor of the Philpott Tabernacle in Hamilton, Ontario, a work founded by Dr. P. W. Philpott. The church had a seating capacity of about 1500. The people were zealous for the work of God. There was not one cent of indebtedness upon the building, which was lighted by a big electric sign, similar to the one on the Church of the Open Door, and telling every citizen of Hamilton that “Jesus Saves.” We were accustomed to begin our evening service at seven o’clock; and by six-thirty we had to turn people away. Souls were being saved—sometimes as many as thirty-five and forty at a time kneeled at the altar. I say it humbly, for those people were leading souls to Christ long before I ever went there. And
how those people of God did love to sing the Gospel hymns! I thought to myself, “This is where I am going to spend the rest of my days—with no worries about money or debts—with all my time to give to the needs of men’s souls.” The members were very kind, giving my family, among other things, a new automobile. I was sure we should spend our lives in that city and in that church!

Then one morning a special delivery letter bore an invitation to come to Los Angeles, to minister in this church. I was told that there was a million dollar indebtedness on this building. And I was told of other problems to be solved. I am ashamed to say that I carried that letter in my pocket about three days before I talked to the Lord about it. I was afraid He would tell me to leave the place that I loved. Then when I did talk to the Lord about it, there was perspiration on my brow. I did not get the rest of consecration until I said, “Lord, I will take Thy yoke upon me.” My friends said that I was acting foolishly, that nothing could save the building here, that the work would close, and I should have the responsibility of being the one at the helm when the storm broke. I was inclined to listen to their reasoning, but I did not get rest of heart until I got under the yoke—the Lord’s yoke for service.

Yet, all the while—and this is fundamental—all the while, I had no doubt in my mind about my rest of salvation. The rest of service had nothing to do with the rest of heart that came when I took Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord.

Now let us ever remember that it is the rest of salvation that the Holy Spirit is talking about in the Epistle to the Hebrews. And how those persecuted, legalistic Hebrews needed that instruction! For some fifteen centuries their forefathers had been living under the law of Moses breaking it far more than keeping it; yet the godly Hebrews did seek to keep God’s law. Israel in the wilderness had missed the rest of God through unbelief. Then, even though Joshua led their children into the land of Canaan, yet again the people murmured against God; they did not drive out all of the wicked people in the land. Still later, in David’s day, their descendants were sinning against God, still missing His rest—by faith in the promised Redeemer. And now the Holy Spirit was warning the Hebrews of the time of Paul against the danger of apostasy, of being intellectually convinced of the claims of Christ, yet of turning back to the temple worship, to the ritual and ceremony of Judaism. It is as though the apostle were saying to his kinsmen according to the flesh, “Israel missed God’s rest under Moses; they missed it under Joshua; they missed it under David; are you going to miss it too?” Indeed, Stephen had been stoned; the apostles had been imprisoned, or beheaded, or persecuted in various ways; Christian Jews had been robbed, buffeted, scorned. Yet they had found the rest of God; they had entered into that rest by faith in the shed blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Surely nothing could rob them of that; nothing could take its place!

I want to ask you this morning, Jew as well as Gentile, in what are you resting? The Hebrews of old were returning to the shedding of the blood of goats and calves, which could never take away sin. People today are seeking rest in a thousand “works of righteousness,” which can never give peace to the restless heart. It is a question of entering into God’s rest, or of missing it by unbelief. Which shall it be?

“To-day if ye shall hear his voice, Harden not your hearts.”

I stood by the bedside of a dying woman a short time ago, and asked her if she knew that her soul was saved. She replied with conviction and a smile that even death could not hide, “I know that my Redeemer liveth!” She knew the meaning of the words of the Prophet Isaiah,

“The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.”

AN EXHORTATION TO ENTER INTO GOD’S REST

In verse 11 of chapter four, immediately following the heart of the message concerning the rest of God, the Holy Spirit exhorts those who read to enter into that rest. We quote the verse here from the Revised Version,
“Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after (or ‘into’) the same example of disobedience.”

The Authorized Version begins this exhortation with the words, “Let us labour . . .” The better translation is, “Let us give diligence”; or as someone has expressed it, “Let us speed to enter into that rest.” The literal Greek word for “labour” here in this verse is “to strive diligently.” The Holy Spirit has just been telling us that God’s rest may be entered into by faith, and by faith alone; and that same Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself. He is not telling us here to labor for something which God freely gives; far from it! He is telling us to “give diligence” to the matter of our soul’s salvation with “speed,” not putting it off, like King Agrippa, until “a convenient season.” Moreover, the passage before us does not say that we are to “labour” for that rest. It does tell us to be “in earnest, be zealous, be sincere,” in our confession of faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, who alone can give us the rest of God.

I want to ask you, my brother, if you are listening to this radio Bible lesson today, do not put off your decision to accept Christ as your Saviour. Make haste to let Him settle the sin question for you forever. Do not delay; but enter by faith into His rest. “Now is the accepted time . . . Now is the day of salvation . . . Harden not your heart.”

The Word of God Is The Test of Rest

I used to wonder why verses 12 and 13 were put just where they are in this fourth chapter, which has to do with the rest of God. Then as I began to study the passage more carefully, I realized that it is the Word of God that is the test of rest. And throughout chapters three and four has not the Holy Spirit been reiterating the warning,

“Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts”?

What is “His voice,” if it is not His inspired Word? Moreover, it is the safeguard against failure to enter into God’s rest through unbelief. And what a striking commentary these two verses are upon the inspired, infallible Word of God!

“For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

The test of rest is this, my friend: If you love the Bible, if you delight in reading of the One of whom it speaks, then you have entered into the rest of God. If you accept the whole message as the inspired Word of God, if you believe in the Living Word whose portrait fills its pages, then the Bible is precious to you. If you do not love God’s Word, if you read it to try to find fault with it, if you set your own finite intellect up against the mind and will of the infinite God, then you know nothing of the rest of which the Bible speaks. Indeed, if your sins have not been washed away in the blood of the Lord Jesus, then this Book will give you no rest at all; rather, it will disturb your thoughts as you read what it says about judgment to come upon all who are not saved.

A missionary to a heathen land once gave a copy of the Bible to a Buddhist priest, and begged him to read it. Later the Buddhist returned to the missionary with the query, “Why is it that this Book hurts me when I read it?” Let me tell you, my unsaved friend, if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are not resting in His finished work on Calvary, then the Bible will hurt you. It will search down into the innermost recesses of your being; it will divide between the joints and the marrow, as it were, reminding you of all your sins, sins which you would rather forget. The Bible will bring them all before you; and as you think of judgment to come, your sins will frighten you. If you do not know the Saviour, then you will not enjoy the Bible. You may read it to be able to argue about it; you may read it to tear it to pieces; you may read it to be informed concerning its history. But unless you know Him of whom the
Bible speaks, you will find no rest for your troubled soul. You will stand in dread of the great white throne and of the lake of fire, whether you will admit that you fear eternity or not. But if you have knelt at the foot of the cross, if you have confessed yourself a guilty sinner, and have laid your sins upon the Lord Jesus, then this Book will comfort you; it will speak peace and joy and hope to your heart. It will tell you that, although you deserve eternal condemnation, yet by faith in Him who bore your shame and guilt, you are an “heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ.” This Book is the test! Your attitude toward it and your response to its message give the answer to whether or not you have entered into God’s rest.

1. *The Word of God Is Living and Powerful.* The Old English word “quick” means “living,” and is so translated in the Revised Version. In another place we read of “the quick and the dead,” meaning “the living and the dead.” And the Word of God is both living and powerful. If you have not discovered this truth, enter into your closet and shut the door; take down this living Book and let it turn the searchlight of God’s truth upon your soul. No one need be in the dark about eternal things; for the Bible is both living and life-giving! Verse 13 uses the masculine pronoun “his” and “him” in connection with the Living Word; for this Book of Books is the spoken voice of the Son of God, who is called “The Word of God.”

Did you ever wish you might have lived upon earth when the Lord Jesus walked among men? Did you ever wish you might have heard His teachings? Well, we do listen to “His voice,” and hear His teachings when we let His Holy Spirit speak to us through the written pages of the Bible. If men, even Christians, only realized this more fully, how much more carefully they would read this sacred Book not hastily snatching a verse for the day, not scanning the pages to prove some debated question, but meditating upon each line, listening for the voice of the Son of God as He utters eternal truths to be found nowhere else in all the world!

That is why, in these two verses from Hebrews, the Holy Spirit identifies the Bible with the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ can not die, then this written Word can not die. If Christ is able to give life, then this Word is able to give life. If Christ has all power, then this Word has all power. If Christ is in the place where no enemies can reach down to destroy Him, then this Word is just as indestructible as is the Son of God Himself.

The opening words of the Gospel of John tell us the same thing,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Words express thoughts. What are the thoughts of God toward us? He has made them known to us through His written Word and in the Person of Christ, the Living Word of God. Christ came to tell us that “God is love.” Therefore, we need not be afraid of God, afraid of His Word. Let all the atheists attack it; let all the infidels ridicule it; yet it abideth forever. Tom Paine, in his “Age of Reason,” asserted that fifty years after he wrote his blasphemous book, the Bible would be found only in a museum. Indeed, a museum is about the only place where one will find “The Age of Reason” today; but the Bible is still the best seller. It has been translated into more than 1,000 languages and dialects. It has outlived fire and sword and critic’s pen; and it will live forever! I love to look upon the words engraved in the stone on the front of the Church of the Open Door; I love to meditate upon their message,

“For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

2. *The Word of God Is Omniscient.* It not only discerns the deepest thoughts of our hearts, but “all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” “Sharper than any two-edged sword,” it cuts into the depths of our innermost being, revealing the guilt and sin, throwing the lens of Holy Writ upon our darkened lives, piercing even to the secret thoughts and intents of our hearts. There is no X-Ray that will so reveal one’s heart-condition as does the living Word of God. And yet the sinner whose guilt has been washed away in the shed blood of Christ need
have no fear. All his sins have been cleansed in the "fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins." They will not face him at the judgment bar of God. They have been judged at the cross!

Charles Haddon Spurgeon tells a story which speaks to us of the life-giving, omniscient power of the Word of God. Men were building a great tabernacle, in which he was to preach in the city of London. There were no amplifiers in those days, perfected as they are in our time; therefore, the problem of acoustics was very important and very real. In order to test the great auditorium, which seated some 10,000 people, Mr. Spurgeon stood behind the pulpit and spoke, while one of his elders listened at the back of the auditorium. The verse which the evangelist quoted was I Tim. 1:15,

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

The sound of Spurgeon's voice was carried clearly to the rear of the great auditorium, and the elder heard every syllable plainly. These two thought they were the only ones who heard I Tim. 1:15 quoted that day. But through an open window Mr. Spurgeon's voice was carried also to a laboring man in the street, working on another building. That laboring man wondered whence the voice came; but not knowing at the time who the human speaker was, yet he was saved that day just through the living, powerful Word of God that touched his hardened heart.

Yes; the Bible is the safeguard against unbelief, and the consequent failure to enter into God's rest!

**Christ, Our Great High Priest, Can and Will Lead Us Into The Rest of God**

In the closing words of chapter four the Holy Spirit was telling the Hebrews of Paul's day that the High Priestly work of Christ guaranteed their entering into God's rest, and in this climax to chapters three and four He is telling Jews and Gentiles of all time that "Jesus the Son of God," by His finished work on the cross and by His present ministry of intercession at the "throne of grace," gives abiding peace of heart and access to the very throne-room of heaven. These last three verses of this long parenthesis take our thoughts back to the first verse of chapter three, where we are told to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus." And in chapter five, which will be the text of our next lesson, the Holy Spirit continues the development of this central theme of the epistle, the High Priestly work of Christ. Let us read, from the Revised Version, these closing verses of chapter four, one of the most soul-satisfying passages in all the Word of God:

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).

These three verses tell in brief the very heart of the message of the epistle. That message is developed in detail in 5:1-10:18, which we shall study in our future lessons. Therefore, we shall not dwell long upon it here, even though whole volumes might be written about these few lines. Let us look at the truths they present, in their order.

1. **"We Have a Great High Priest . . . Jesus the Son of God."** Never in all the Bible is an earthly priest called "great." Even Aaron, Israel's first high priest, was never described as great; for while Moses was upon Mount Sinai, receiving from God the ten commandments and all the ceremonial and moral law, Aaron made a golden calf and led Israel into idolatry. Later he murmured against Moses, as we have seen earlier in this lesson. And, together with Moses, he sinned in smiting the rock the second time when Israel was in need of water in the wilderness, a sin which kept Aaron and Moses out of the promised land. The smitten rock was a type of Christ, "smitten of God, and afflicted" for the sins of the world; and even as Christ was to be crucified "once for all," likewise Moses and Aaron were told to "smite" the rock once; then to "speak" to the rock the sec-
ond time. In their anger at Israel's rebellion and murmuring, they struck the rock twice the second time. God gave Israel water to drink; but for this sin Aaron died and was buried in Mount Hor; Moses, on Mount Nebo—both before Joshua led Israel into Canaan. And these are only a few of the sins of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. He was not great; only Christ is Israel's "Great High Priest." The only thing about man that is "great" in the sight of our holy God is man's sin.

But "Jesus the Son of God" is "great" in His High Priestly work. He alone can be trusted with the salvation of the sinner's soul. He alone can be trusted to take all of the believer's troubles and heartaches and problems, and make "all things work together for good to them that love God." Because He that "keepeth Israel" neither slumbers nor sleeps, His ministry at the throne of grace is uninterrupted, as well as unchangeable and omnipotent. "Jesus never fails!"

It is interesting to note that, in his epistles to Gentiles, Paul never once called Christ the "Great High Priest." Why? Because to Israel, in the law of Moses, the priesthood was given to foreshadow the Lord Jesus Christ and His church. The heathen, Gentile world did not know the Old Testament Scriptures; therefore, Paul used other terms in writing to Gentiles, recently saved from heathenism; such terms as "Intercessor," "Advocate," "Mediator." The wonderful truth of all this is that these expressions set forth exactly what the term "Great High Priest" suggests—the One whose shed blood atones for the soul; the One who ever lives to pray for His redeemed—Jew or Gentile; the One who deals gently with His blood-bought children. This is the ministry of Israel's Great High Priest; this is the ministry of the "Intercessor" and "Advocate" and "Mediator" of all the redeemed—whether Jew or Gentile. Three quotations will suffice just here to prove that this is so:

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1).

"There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5).

These three terms set forth the work of Jesus, Israel's "Great High Priest" and the Saviour of the world, in language that all can understand, Jew as well as Gentile. An intercessor pleads the cause of another; and the Lord Jesus pleads the cause of His redeemed before the court of heaven, showing His "five bleeding wounds" in token of His right to intercede. An advocate is a lawyer or judge who takes the part of another; and who has as much right as our Lord to take our part? Did He not purchase us who believe on Him by His own precious blood? A mediator is a "go-between." As our "daysman" or mediator, the Lord Jesus takes hold of the throne of God, and takes hold of His redeemed "brethren." Because He is eternal God, He takes hold of the throne of God; and because He is perfect Man, He lays hold of His blood-bought children. And nothing can "separate us from the love of Christ." His intercessory work before the throne of grace guarantees that!

The very names of our Lord, used by the Holy Spirit in Heb. 4:14, prove that He has the right to be called our "Great High Priest"; for as "Jesus," He was the Man of Galilee; as "the Son of God," He is eternal Lord. What a combination of His glorious names, to set forth the ministry of the "one mediator between God and men"!

2. He "Hath Passed through the Heavens." The Authorized Version translates these words, "He hath passed into the heavens"; but the Revised Version is more accurate, using "through" instead of "into." We know the Bible teaches that Paul was caught up into "the third heaven," which is "paradise" (II Cor. 12:1-4). The first heaven is the sky above; hence we speak of the blue of the heaven. The second heaven is the realm of the planets. The third heaven is where God's throne is, where the saved are "forever with the Lord." Therefore, there is a deep and wonderful meaning in the words of the Holy Spirit in Heb. 4:14,
which tell us that our Great High Priest has “passed through the heavens.” When He ascended into heaven, He passed through the sky above, through the realm of the stars, on into the very presence of His Father, and “sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.”

This truth becomes all the more wonderful to us as we remember that Satan is “the prince of the power of the air . . . the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). The earth and the sky are filled with Satan’s hosts, who seek to turn men away from God. That is why Paul admonished the Ephesian Christians, saying,

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (i.e., ‘the heavenlies’) (Eph. 6:11, 12).

Peter, likewise, said,

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

When Satan accused Job, he used words almost identical with those Peter used; for he told God that he had been “going to and fro in the earth . . . walking up and down in it” (Job 1:7; 2:2). Satan was Job’s “accuser,” even as he is today “the accuser of our brethren,” who are the children of God. (See Rev. 12:10.) Once a beautiful angel, he became puffed up because of his beauty, and rebelled against God. Then he was cast out of heaven; and ever since, he has been the enemy of God. One day he will be cast into the lake of fire, forever there where he can not tempt man and bring sin and sorrow and suffering upon the world. (See Rev. 20:10.) But now he is a mighty, though fallen, angel; the earth and “the heavenlies” are the scene of his wicked devices. And only in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God can the redeemed fight victoriously this enemy of the soul.

And why can the redeemed be victorious over Satan? Bec-
“the accuser of our brethren” will be cast out of the heavens into the earth (Rev. 12:7-12). It will be a terrific battle, the like of which none of us can conceive. The devil’s presence on earth will cause the terrible suffering of “the great tribulation.” But after a short period, he will be bound for “a thousand years” (Rev. 20:1-3), during which time the Lord Jesus will rule over a purified earth. Then still later Satan will be cast into the lake of fire, “to be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Do you see something of Satan’s power, my friend? Do you see how necessary it was that our Great High Priest should pass “through the heavens,” having conquered the devil and all his hosts? That is why we have taken time just here to go into these Scriptures; we need to realize the power of the enemy of our souls; and we want to know better how to thank our omnipotent Lord, that His love for us has made it possible for us to triumph over Satan now, and that His love and power have already triumphed for us—for all eternity—over this arch-deceiver. Having “passed through the heavens,” He is interceding for us at this moment. This truth is the heart of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Satan does not want us to know that He is real. He deceives countless thousands into believing that he is a myth or a legend. Some laughingly call him “Old Nick,” or “Old Harry,” or “Old Scratch.” Some scorn the idea of a personal devil. But, my friend, Satan is very real and very terrible. He comes to the unsuspecting as “an angel of light,” making sin seem a pleasure. Certainly he wants men not to believe in his reality; then they will blindly worship him, denying the Christ of God. Do not fall into his snares, or be deceived by his wiles. Look to “Jesus the Son of God” and let Him minister for you as your “Great High Priest.” He alone can deliver you from Satan’s snares.

3. He Is “Touched with the Feeling of Our Infirmities.” Because our Lord Jesus “suffered being tempted,” He is the sympathetic Saviour. He understands our sorrows; He knows what it is to be misunderstood, falsely accused, forsaken by those He loved, betrayed by His “own familiar friend.” He knew weariness, hunger, loneliness, sorrow. He was the “Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” That is why, in His intercession, He can sympathize with us in time of need.

4. He Was “in All Points Tempted . . . Apart from Sin”; that is, “without sin.” Because He was absolutely holy, He could not be tempted to sin. That is what the literal rendering of this passage means. We have often dwelt at length upon this fundamental truth, and we shall again, as we study chapter seven of this epistle. Just here suffice it to say that the Lord Jesus could declare that He always did those things that pleased His Father in heaven. Satan himself could not tempt Him to sin. Even His bitterest enemies could find “no fault in him.” Their accusations were untrue and unfair in the extreme. That is why He could offer Himself a sinless, perfect sacrifice for our sins, thus becoming our “Great High Priest” in His death. He was tempted in “all points like as we are, sin apart.”

5. “Let Us Therefore Come Boldly unto the Throne of Grace.” “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God,” let us go to Him with all our problems and troubles and heartaches and sorrows. Let us realize that we have access to the very throne-room of heaven; and that God’s judgment throne has been changed into a “throne of grace” for the believer in the Lord Jesus. Your little child, my friend, does not have to knock at the door of your home for entrance; he opens the door boldly, and walks into the house. You are God’s redeemed child, if you have put your faith in the High Priestly work of Christ. Enter boldly, not with fear and trembling, into His gracious presence. “The prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15:8).

The Hebrews, to whom Paul was writing, could realize the wonder of this privilege of access; for the Holy of Holies in the Jewish tabernacle and temple could be entered only by the high priest once a year. That sacred room was a type of heaven, as this epistle plainly states later on. When the vail of the temple was rent in twain at the death of
Christ, God was saying to His ancient people, Israel, and to all who will believe Him, that "the way into the holiest of all was made manifest," that now the sinner had access into God's very presence through the blood of His cross.

We can not go into the discussion of the significance of the mercy seat that covered the ark of the covenant in the Jewish tabernacle; but those of you who studied those lessons with us remember that it hid from view the broken commandments, and that upon it was the sprinkled blood. We shall have more to say about all this later in these studies; we mention it here briefly, for we want no one to miss the truth set forth—that, before he can pray before "the throne of grace," he must go to Calvary's Cross. The judgment throne of God becomes the throne of grace as the sinner approaches Him by the way of the cross. There is no other way of access into the presence of a thrice-holy God.

My Christian friend, is there unconfessed sin in your life? Then there is a cloud between you and the face of God; yet that cloud does not affect His attitude toward you; it affects your attitude toward Him. Come boldly unto the throne of grace; confess your sin; and have your fellowship fully restored. Is there some hidden sorrow in your life, some burden and anxious care? Come boldly unto the throne of grace, and let your Great High Priest bear your burden. Is there some loved one out of Christ? Cast "all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (I Peter 5:7). He cares, and He is able to answer your prayer.

My unsaved friend, will you not enter now, by faith, into the rest of God? Your soul will be restless until it rests in Him. Believe His Word, and be saved by the one perfect sacrifice of the only Great High Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God. Accept Him as your Saviour; then you, too, may "come boldly unto the throne of grace," that you may "find grace to help in time of need." He can and will lead you into His rest because He is both merciful and faithful, eternal God and perfect Man.

"To-day if ye shall hear his voice,
Harden not your hearts."

"His voice" is full of compassion and love,
"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest."