

Title: Lettuce – pt.1
Text: Hebrews 4.1-13
Theme: The command of faith
Series: Hebrews #9
Prop Stmtt We are commanded to fully believe NOW, lest we miss God’s offer.

The more I study this book, the more I am convinced of the absolute genius status of the author of Hebrews. His arguments and reasoning, and weaving of concepts is at times, very complex. The closer you look at this book, the more you see intricate arrangements and subtle nuances that excite your soul and provide racing fuel for your faith and worship engine. We could spend 10 years in this book. It is that deep. I am resisting that urge, and seeking to keep us on track to work through it in a reasonable amount of time. What I present before you is just some of the treasures that await discovery.

Read Text:

What are you fighting against – right now! What is the internal struggle of soul, the gnawing fear that grips your heart, the thought that like a knife disrupts your peace, robs you of you and releases a shot of adrenaline that causes your heart to race? What keeps you awake at night? What are your repeating nightmares of life; the “I could never survive if that ever happened” scenarios that hound your thoughts with unrelenting steps of pursuit? What are the “what ifs” that steal your attention and give you a heaviness of spirit? This text is about rest. No deep study is needed to convince us of that. Just look at how many times the word “rest” appears in the first 11 verses.

1 Review, 2 questions, 3 points, and 4 appeals

Hebrews was written to early Jewish believers who were tempted to turn back from the gospel and return to Judaism. The social pressure was enormous, the political pressure was severe, the reality that this world is no friend to the gospel and that following Christ is tough, all combined for one discouraged group of people. But the truth was, some of these people were not genuine followers of Christ and the pressure that they were under was revealing who was a real and who wasn’t. With this in view, it makes sense why the AH spends a good bit of attention comparing Judaism to Christianity. Even today we tend to think of Judaism as one of the world’s great religions that is in contrast to Christianity. The proper way to see it, is being foundational to Christianity. The OT points to Christ. That has been emphasized in our study so far. Christ is superior to all which is why Moses and the rest of the OT pointed to him. Rather than seeing Moses in competition to Christ, we should see Moses and the Law as being completed in Christ.

Moses and his message (Law)	to	Christ and his message (gospel)
Temporary, good, important		Permanent, perfect and infinitely important

Of course the reason why this point is made is so that these believers will realize that if they return to Judaism, they will be going back to something that is inferior. Don’t go back. Instead, Press on Pilgrim!

Since the NT people of God stand on the shoulders of the OT people of God, we should expect there to be some similar patterns – and there are, particularly in this text. Our text for today is part of an argument that began back in chapter 3. Chapter 3 is more warning and chapter 4 is more admonition/encouragement. In this section, the warning that is made is based on the fact that the AH is fearful that some of the people in the church were following the same pattern as the children of Israel who came about of Egypt. God has provided a wonderful rest for his people, and yet there are some people who are associated with this church who are in danger of missing it (precisely because they are not truly God’s people – but who are associating with God’s people and are deceived into thinking that they are believers). This particular section is essentially an exposition of Psalm 95. Psalm 95 is the backdrop to this section. The wilderness wanderings, the continued experiences of unbelief and God’s judgment upon his people and the subsequent finality of the entire generation (20 years of age and over) of being told by God that you will not enter the Promised land, hung like a dark cloud upon them whose weight still leans heavily upon these pages. So, he is warning them and the warning (chap. 3) looks like this:

Revelation responded to by Unbelief/Rebellion results in God’s wrath and loss of Rest.

Because this is so important, we need to be warned and be exhorted (3.12-13), which is a group/church effort. The exhorting “one another daily” (v.13) is reciprocal. I need this. You need this. We have blind spots and cannot know our own motives and do not see our weaknesses as we should – either in view of God’s grace, or in view of our self-righteousness. I am usually blind to my own sin. I need you to point it out. But when I see it, I tend to either justify it by finding someone who, in my opinion is worse than me, or by failing to appropriate the gospel. We need to exhort one another. That is we need to be involved in honest to God kind of relationships with each other where we have the opportunity to listen and to speak into each other’s hearts in order to help one another grow. If we don’t then some of you who are not genuine believers, but who are deceived into thinking you are, will never be faced with that, and you will die and go to hell in part because no one cared to take the time to help you face that. The AH is concerned that in this group of believers there are individuals who are not genuine believers. (e.g. 3.12) He is warning them individually and the group collectively to see to the condition of their souls. That is the warning of chapter 3. But, on the other hand (chapter 4)...

Revelation received by Faith/Obedience results in God’s reward and the promised Rest.

Therefore, chaps 3 & 4 are dealing with the same idea. Chap 3 focuses upon the past (Exodus generation) and warns us not to be like them. Chap 4 focuses upon the present and the future and encourages us with God’s promises. Fact is, both chapters are dealing with promises. Chap. 3 – promise of wrath for unbelief and chap. 4 – promise of rest for authentic faith.

2 questions

Question 1 - What does the AH mean when he refers to “rest”?

Katapausin – to cease from activity, to be restrained, to be caused to relax – rest

The word is used in three different ways here. 1) God rested from his creative work. (v.4) That does not mean that God was so wiped out from everything that he did that he had to take day off to sleep in and recover. He stopped creating and on the 7th day, he ceased working. Now, when you go back and look at the flow of thought from Genesis 1.31 – 2.3, you see that at the end of the 6th day of creation, God pronounced that everything that he had made was very good. So, on the 7th day, he stopped creating (listen carefully, this is very important to understand) in order to enjoy what he had made. Let me explain it this way. Some of you mothers understand this concept very well. When you have young children, they amaze you with the output of energy and volume. Their relentless noise and busyness is exhausting. Finally, you say, “I’ve got a great idea! Let’s all take a nap.” And they say, “But mommy, we’re not tired.” No, but you are tired. And because you are tired, everyone has to lie down, and you are just praying, “God, please, let me just get 10 minutes, that’s all that I am asking for. I just need a break.” Now, that is NOT what is happening here. God does not need a break. The Sabbath was not a national time-out, everyone go to your room event. The reason why God stopped creating on the 7th day was, because he was done and because he wanted to enjoy what he had made. Now, that aspect is not immediately clear from the Genesis account, but it does become clear as the theology of what Sabbath rest really means. God’s subsequent command to the children of Israel to set aside Saturday as the day of rest (4th commandment – Ex. 20.8-11), was not to be a day of inactivity as the Pharisees came to view it. Oh NO! It was a day to stop working (earning money) so you could enjoy what God has done for you – take a walk, play with your family, gather as a community, worship and celebrate! The Sabbath rest, was rest from work SO THAT you could enjoy what the work provided, all of which were ultimately gifts from God! Now, this Sabbath rest for the OT people of God looked back to the 7th day of the 1st week AND pointed to a NT Sabbath rest that is provided for by Christ and fulfilled in Christ and enjoyed in Christ. Keep that in mind. 2) The Promised Land was the promised rest for the children of Israel. (v.3, 5) It was a rest from their wanderings. It was a rest from having to constantly be on guard from their enemies whose lands they were traversing. It was a rest in the sense that once they got into their own land they could finally sit in one place and put down their roots. So, the “rest” that the rebellious children of Israel missed out because of their continual defiance of Moses, was the rest of the Promised Land (v.3.18; 4.3, 5) But they missed out on more than just being able to get into the land, because this concept of rest goes beyond just stopping your work and sitting down for a while.

When you look ahead to verse 9 you see that Sabbath and rest are combined. However, in v.9 it is not referring to a day of the week, but to a 3) future and guaranteed reality for the genuine followers of Christ. In other words, the author is describing for us what eternity is going to be like. Eternity is going to a place of rest. NO, not inactivity, but a rest from our struggle against unbelief, against sorrow, our struggle of perseverance, our struggle through persecution, our struggle through disappointment. Think of it like this.

Have you ever taken your child to the doctor, and the doctor had to give your child a shot, or do a procedure that really hurt? There is hardly anything that is more agonizing than this. Your child is thrashing and screaming, and what do you do? You pick up your child holding him as tight as you can in order to try to absorb all of his pain. By wrapping your arms around this little body, you restrain him from activity, and after a while, he gives up the fight and falls asleep in your arms. That's the rest that this word is talking about and it ultimately points to Christ. Here is how it all comes together. Faith alone in Christ alone means that we stop thrashing about in our own energies, endlessly seeking through our own self-righteous efforts to gain his approval find his favor. This rest is ours when Christ comes and embraces us with his pardon and wraps us so tightly that we transfer to him the entire trust of our lives and by faith we fall asleep in his arms: that is we stop trying to achieve in by our own merits, or deeds or religious ceremonies, what he has already secured. This rest in Christ is describing the position and the affects of being truly at peace with God through the gospel of Christ. This rest is the result of being in Christ. One day, the rest that we have in Christ now, will be fulfilled in the eternal Sabbath rest (v.9) where we all perfectly and fully enjoy all that God has made, all that God has done, and all that we are. This rest is the most soul-satisfying, joyful celebration ever conceived. I don't want you to miss that. But what is so infinitely greater is that God does not want you to miss that. His joy and glory is exponentially increased through your joyful experience of this, which awaits you and is available to you, but must be received by faith alone in Christ alone. The author of Hebrews is writing to the church as a whole, warning individuals within that church that some of them, who are associated with the church are not truly related to Christ. They are in danger. What will happen to them is the same thing that happened to the children of Israel as described in Psalm 95.

Oh beloved, I want to preach this text with the proper emphasis upon warning you not to miss this rest, but I want to do so in such a way that encourages you so strongly to find the security of heart, the release of tension, and the resting of soul completely in Christ. I hope to press this upon so strongly so that this rest is held before you in such a clear and vivid way that you are resolved to do all that you can to be embraced by our Savior. This helps us answer the second question.

Question 2 - *How can you enter that rest by belief (v.3) and yet be commanded to strive to enter that rest (v.11)? Is it belief (faith) or is it striving (works)?*

I am simply raising the question at this point, and will answer it when we get to verse 11 in a couple of minutes. But, keep it in mind, because it is very important.

Chart

Now, that you have the picture, let's work through the text. In contrast to the warning of missing the rest in chapter 3, chapter 4 begins by pointing out that the promise of entering his rest – still stands! God had not yet slammed the door, like he finally did in the wilderness. Because he is patient and merciful, but not forever, you must respond, while the opportunity is still there. The promise of entering his rest still stands. So... **3 Points**

1. **Let us Fear** (1-5)

Literally – Let us (the AH includes himself) begin to fear. The implication is that the congregation was not taking the Word of God seriously. The warnings are real. The consequences for rejecting them are real and so are the joys for believing and obeying them. So, let's take this seriously. This, more than anything else – matters! And once again, notice how the author applies this to himself. “Let us” (now you know where the title came from – there are actually four of them in the chapter – v.1, v.11, v.14 and v.16). The appeal is made to all because he is convinced that there are some who are not genuine believers and the evidence of that will be seen in their failure to persevere and the consequences of that are eternal.

How do you hear this warning? – For others? – For you and others? If only for others, then you really need to pay attention!

A. **Because the consequences of unbelief are eternal** (1-5)

“lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it” (1b)

“they were not united by faith with those who listened” (2b)

“As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” (3, 5b)

B. **Because the benefits of genuine faith are incredible** (2, 3)

“Good news came to us” - The good news that they heard was incredible. They heard that God would deliver them from their slavery and bring them back to their own land. They forfeited the promise that was offered because they did not believe God. The promise of God was not met with belief.

“We who have believed enter that rest” (3) What a promise! What a hope!

Since the consequences for unbelief are so severe and the benefits of genuine faith so incredible, you can understand why the AH is so intent on warning and encouraging his readers to make certain that they do not fail to reach that rest.

C. **Because we are just like them** (2)

Since good news came to us just as to them, like them we have good news (promises and gospel) and like them we have to respond to this good news with authentic faith. Being in the Exodus did not mean that you were going into Canaan. Being associated with the gospel does not mean that you get it. What is the evidence in your life that demonstrates that your faith is real? So, what do you do?

2. **(Let us) respond with faith to this encouragement – NOW!** (6-10)

I put “let us” in parenthesis because it is implied and not explicitly stated. I remind you that there are three different audiences that are in view. (The Exodus generation, the

Psalm 95 audience and the NT/us people) The Exodus generation amazingly did not believe God and did not enter the rest that he had provided for them. But, the rest that he provided pointed to another, more important rest that is available. That is clear from Psalm 95, where the writer is telling the children of Israel, who were in the land at the time of the writing of Psalm 95, hundreds of years after the Exodus generation, that they too are in danger of missing the rest of God, if they do not truly believe God. So, obviously the rest is not fulfilled in the land. The Promised Land was a real rest (1 Kings 8.56), but was not the ultimate rest as evident from verse 8. Now, we live after Christ, which means that we live after He secured that rest. The rest he secured is what the OT pointed to, but that does not mean that we have truly entered it. Take this to heart and...

A. Respond with faith Today. (6-8)

Verses 6-7 are telling us that the promise of God's rest is still in place. The fact that there were those who forfeited that promise because of unbelief (v.5) means that the promise still stands for those who will accept it. The fact that others rejected this promise does not mean that the promise is gone. The promise of God is still available. "it remains" (6). So, respond with faith today because if you respond with delay (unbelief), then you are setting into motion, or continuing a pattern of unbelief. God will respond to that now, as he did then (Ps 95; 3.7-11, noting the connection between 7b-8a and 10-11)

B. Authentic faith activates the promise for you. (9)

The genuine people of God are people of trust in God! How do I know if I really believe? Well, how do you respond to pressure? How do you respond to disappointment? How do you respond to trials? - Matthew 13 – 4 types of soil.

C. Faith in Christ provides rest. (10)

I believe that verse 10 is referring more to the believer who is alive than the one who has already gone home to glory, although this rest is both an "already" and a "not yet". This text certainly emphasizes the "not yet" aspect of the rest. The rest that is in store for us is held up as an encouragement for us to press on.

a. Rest from works – righteousness

Hear this clearly. Your moral efforts and good deeds do not earn you favor before God. You can try as hard as you can to be good and it will never be good enough. You can work all of your life in an attempt to make-up for failures, and there are plenty of people who love nothing more than to step on you. Here is the good news: Christ lived a perfect life in your place. He was perfect because you couldn't be. When he died on the cross, he offered up his perfect life as the perfect payment to pay for your sin. His payment was perfect and it was accepted, and he rose again from the dead. His work for you was so complete that he did not leave you with anything for you do to do in order to achieve forgiveness from God. So, instead of going to church in order to earn points, or doing good deeds to earn God's favor – Stop trusting in your efforts. Turn away from that and

trust Christ. Rest in Christ. Run to Christ. Let him embrace you. Fall upon him and stop churning and relentlessly attempting to achieve his approval – you can't! But Christ did! Rest on that beloved! His grace is full. His forgiveness is free. His love binds you and will not let you go.

- b. Rest from fear, knowing that you will have...
- c. Future Rest from all struggle and perfect enjoyment of all that God has done.
- d. Encouragement to press on pilgrim.

Therefore...

3. **Let us strive to enter that rest.** (11-13) (essentially repeat of #1)

What does this mean? Listen carefully! I am answering the question that I raised earlier of “how can you enter that rest by belief (v.3) and yet be commanded to strive to enter that rest (v.11)?” Since (v.3) “we who have believed enter that rest” and since (3.19) “they were unable to enter because of unbelief”, striving to enter that rest means to make every effort to make certain that your faith is real. Do not assume that your faith is real if your life is marked by failing to respond to God’s word with faith-driven love and obedience. But how do I know if I am for real?

THE WORD!!!! Use the Word!!! (v.12-13) (more on this next week)

Do you see why God is so intense on this point? Do you see why he is so deeply concerned that you do not miss this rest? The

The trophy is worth the practice. The baby is worth the labor. The victory is worth the hardship. The weight loss is worth the discipline. The marathon is worth the training. All of these are metaphors for the great race and the great prize.

4 Appeals

- 1 – Examine yourself with the Word - What is the evidence in your life that demonstrates that your faith is real?
- 2 – Repent
- 3 – Believe
- 4 – Press on pilgrim