**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (10): The Book Of Better Things**

**“God’s Promised Rest”**

**Hebrews 4:1-11**

**March 10, 2024**

Many years ago, I was blessed to be part of the fellowship at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Center City, Philadelphia. Among other things, the call to worship each and every Sunday was especially memorable. After the prelude, James Montgomery Boice would step up to the pulpit and quote the words of our Savior: “*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heaven laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*” (Matt. 11:28-29, KJV).

This promise of “rest” is the central theme of our author’s thought in Hebrews 4:1-11. It’s what he calls a “*Sabbath-rest for the people of God*” (v. 9), which has existed since the seventh day of creation. It’s entered by faith in the person and work of Christ, and will ultimately be fulfilled in the new creation when Christ returns (the new heavens and earth).

As we may recall from last week’s study, this “rest” is the spiritual counterpart to the earthly rest of the Exodus generation (Hebrews 3:7-11). The land of Canaan was their promised rest, which was the goal that was set before them when they set out from Egypt. But as we have seen, they hardened their hearts against God and refused to trust Him. The tragic result was that God swore in His wrath that they would never enter the “rest” He had prepared for them. Almost everyone of that generation died in the wilderness because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:16-19).

In the verses before us today, our author applies this sad lesson to his readers (including us). His flow of thought is somewhat complex, but his message is clear: the rest that God intended for His people is a *spiritual* rest and has much greater significance than living safely in Canaan. That’s the “thread” that will “sew” all the pieces of this passage together.

**A. The Promise of Entering God’s Rest Is Offered to Us In the Gospel (4:1-2):** “*Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith*.”

The little word “therefore” indicates that the author is about to draw a very important conclusion about the availability of God’s rest *and* the failure of the Israelites to enter it (Ps. 95:7-11). The only way he arrives at this conclusion is by viewing the *physical* rest of Canaan as a “type,” or a “prophetic preview” of a *spiritual* rest. Since the promise of *this* rest “still stands,” then his conclusion necessarily follows: “*Let us be careful that none of you should seem to have fallen short of it*” (v. 1b). Literally, it’s “*Let us fear . . .*” the possibility of missing God’s rest. Why fear? Because the thought of God’s judgment *should* inspire fear (Cf. 2:3; 10:26-27, 31; 12:21).

We are all responsible for the spiritual health of the church (“Let *us* fear . . . that none of *you*). In the words of one commentator, “We ought to take careful note of members who may be drifting from the faith in doctrine or conduct and then pray with them and for them. Says Philip Edgcumbe Hughes in his commentary on this point, ‘There is no attitude more dangerous for the church than that of unconcern and complacency’” (William Hendriksen).

The Old Testament Israelites had the gospel preached to them, just as it has been preached to the New Testament saints (v. 2). That “good news” included God’s promise to deliver them from Egypt, and to bring them safely to the land He had promised to their forefathers, and to give them possession of it (Exodus 6:1-9; 19:3-6; 23:20-23). The reason such good news proved to be of no value was because the message they heard was not “*mixed with faith*” (NIV). The practical application is clear: There is always the possibility that some within the fellowship might fail to enter the promised rest for the same reason that the Israelites under Moses fell short of entering it. No one shall enter God’s “*salvation rest*” unless his faith is anchored securely in Jesus Christ.

**B. We Who Have Believed Enter the Rest of Psalm 95:11 (vv. 3-5).**  “*Now we who believed enter that rest, just as God has said, ‘So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest*” (Ps. 95:11) *And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work’* (Gen. 2:2). *And again in the passage above he says, ‘They shall never enter my rest’* (Ps. 95:11).”

It now becomes clear that the “rest” spoken of in Psalm 95:11 is *not* the earthly Canaan. The people addressed by the Psalmist were already living in the Promised Land, as their ancestors had been for generations. Therefore, when God says, “*They shall never enter my rest*” (Ps. 95:11), His rest must refer to something beyond that physical possession. The key for unlocking the meaning is our author’s second Old Testament quote: “*And on the seventh day God rested from all his work*” (Gen. 2:2). Clearly, the “rest” which God promises to His people is a share in the rest which He Himself enjoys, which is an eternal rest. Those who have believed the gospel message are entering His rest now. But as we shall see, God’s rest is also equivalent to the “*heavenly country*” (11:16), the “*heavenly Jerusalem*” (12:22); the “*kingdom that cannot be shaken*” (12:28), and “*the city that is to come*” (13:14). It’s ultimate fulfillment lies in the future.

**C. The Rest that the Israelites Experienced did not Completely Fulfill the Promise of God’s Rest (vv. 6-8):** “*It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day*.”

Yes, it was disobedience that kept the Exodus generation out of God’s promised rest, in spite of the good news preached to them. But that same promised rest was still open for the people of God centuries after that generation’s failure. Four hundred years later, Psalm 95 designated another day as the day (“*Today*”) to hear God’s voice and enter God’s rest. This proves that David had in mind a rest beyond the enjoyment of life in Israel. If Joshua had given the people their ultimate rest at the time of their conquest, “God would not have spoken about another day.” Hence, the *temporal* rest which Israel entered under Joshua was an earthly anticipation of an ultimate, *salvation* rest.

**D. God’s Promised Rest for the People of God is His Sabbath Rest (vv. 9-11):** “*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience*.” When God completed His work of creation, He “rested.” In the same way, when His people have completed their service on earth, they enter into His rest. What, then, is this Sabbath rest which awaits us? It’s “the eternal homeland which is the heritage of believers” (F. F. Bruce); it’s “*the better country – a heavenly one*” (Heb. 11:16a), the “*city*” which God has prepared for us (11:16b), “*the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*” (11:10).

Since faith is the means by which we enter God’s rest (v. 3), and in view of the glory that awaits us (vv. 9-10), our author urges his readers (and us) to make *every effort* to attain this goal. Once again, the need for persevering faith is emphasized (Cf. 2:1; 3:6, 14). So, *our* concern should be our author’s concern, namely, that no one (*among us*) will fall by following the example of the faithless Exodus generation (3:18; 4:6). *You* are the means by which God desires to keep *others* faithful to the end, and *others* are the means by which God desires to keep *you* faithful to the end. A “Lone Ranger Christian” is a disaster waiting to happen!

From these verses, there are several important truths that have emerged. *First,* there is a *continuity* between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God. The *hope* of all God’s people is a *heavenly rest* (not the re-establishment of the Jews in the land of Israel, with the church “hovering in the heavenlies”). There is only one people of God, with one destiny in view.

*Second*, there is a *correlation* between “the good news” that Moses preached as the Israelites

moved toward the Promised Land *and* the “good news” that we embrace as we move toward our eternal homeland. The way of salvation in both the Old and New Testaments is the same: faith in the promises of God.

*Third*, it is *persevering* faith that enables God’s people to *know* that they will inherit a share in God’s promised rest. The warning in Psalm 95:7-8 is directed to Israelites who were professing believers in Yahweh. Likewise, this warning is directed to professing believers in Christ. Both warnings are addressed to the congregation of assembled saints, which means that perseverance is a community project: “See to it *brothers*, that *none of you* has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God (3:12). “Let *us* be careful that *none of you*” be found to have fallen shortof entering God’s rest (4:1). “Let *us* . . . make every effort to enter that rest, so that *no one* will fall” (4:1).

Ultimately, the message of Hebrews is that we cannot make it alone. We cannot flourish in the absence of other Christians. We need someone there to pick us up when we fall down; to call us back when we have turned aside; and to point us in the right direction. So, let *all of us* here at Bethel Christian Fellowship be very, very careful that *none of us* be found to have fallen short of entering God’s rest. We really do need one another! q