**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (11): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Living, Piercing And Heart-Searching Word Of God”**

**Hebrews 4:12-13**

**March 17, 2024**

Last week we were confronted with an urgent warning. As we may recall, our author has urged us to “*make every effort*” to enter God’s “rest,” so that no one may perish by following Israel’s sad example in the wilderness (Heb. 4:11). That “rest,” as we have seen, is God’s *salvation rest*, which has been available since the seventh day of creation. “Today,” it’s entered by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross (Heb. 2:17-18)

There is, however, a future rest that still awaits us. It’s our eternal homeland, which is the heritage of all believers – “*the city without foundations, whose architect and builder is God*” (Heb. 11:10); a “*a better country – a heavenly one*” (Heb. 11:16a); the “*city*” which God has prepared for us (Heb. 11:16b). Ultimately, God’s promised rest finds its fulfillment in the new creation when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and ushers in the new heavens and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:4).

But as we know, there is always the temptation to “drift away” from the message we have heard (Heb. 2:1-4) and to “disbelieve” the promises that God has given (Heb. 3:6b-4:11). That’s the reason for the urgent warning found in Hebrews 4:11: “*Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience*.”

In the verses before us today (Heb. 4:12-13), our author is presenting the reasons why we should give serious attention to that exhortation. The little word, “*For,*” with which verse 12 begins, is the connecting link. If, for example, someone should ask, “Why should I ‘strive’ to enter that rest (ESV)?” And “Why should I be careful not to fall into the same sort of disbelief as they did?,” the answer is given in verses 12-13: “***For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account***.” Here are the questions we must ask of these verses:

**A. What is the “word” of God?** In Hebrews, the primary reference is to the *spoken Word* of God. It’s the good news that was preached to these readers, just as it was preached to the Exodus generation (Heb. 4:2). It was also the “Word” that the church in the first century heard from the apostles after it was first announced by the Lord (2:3). For us today, it’s the *written Word* of God, or the Scriptures. Therefore, what Scripture says, God says. Yes, the Bible is written by human authors, but He is the ultimate Author. “*ALL Scripture is inspired by God*,” says Paul (2 Tim. 3;16), and Peter reinforces that truth when he says that “*Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter. 1:21). Just think of the hopeless condition we would be in if left to our own speculations and insights and wisdom!

That’s why my word, or the word of any other teacher or preacher is fundamentally useless unless what I speak is what God has already spoken. *My* words are of no value to you unless they can explain and apply *God’s* Word to you. The Bible *is* the Word of God.

**B. What is it about this “Word” that is so important?**  The answer is found in five features that our author is highlighting:

**1. The Word of God is *Living*** (“Quick,” KJV). The primary reason the Bible is the living word of God is because of what it *does*. The Apostle Peter has written, “*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God . . .And this is the word that was preached to you*” (1 Peter 1:23, 25). James says the same; “*He* (God) *chose to give us birth through the word of truth . . .*” (James 1:18). That word was the same word which fell on disbelieving ears in the wilderness, but which is now speaking again “*in these last days*” (Heb. 1:3). It is not anything like the word of man; it is the living, life-giving Word of God.

**2. The Word of God is Active** (“powerful,” KJV). The primary reason the Bible is active is because it produces effects. It gets things done. It is the instrument God uses to convert our souls and change our lives. It follows through on what it promises. This thought is summarized for us in Isaiah 55, where the God of Israel says, “*Âs the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish . . . so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it*”(vv. 10-11). For born again Christians, the Word of God is always powerful, active, and energetic. It is always useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). It’s the lamp for our feet and light on our path (Ps. 119:105). It’s designed to guide and govern our daily lives.

**3. The Word of God is Sharper Than Any Double-Edged Sword**, piercing as far as division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow. Some believe that the two edges of God’s Word are a reference to the Old Testament and New Testament. Others point to the fact that the Word has a two-fold result; it either saves or condemns. But the point may simply be that the Word never fails to cut; it has no blunt side. Further, when we read that the Word pierces as far as the division of “soul and spirit” and of “joints and marrow,” our author is not providing us with an analysis of our personality or bodily make-up. He’s speaking metaphorically, portraying in graphic terms the piercing power of God’s Word. It probes into the deepest recesses of our inmost being, enabling us to see what we often don’t see, namely, the sin and unbelief lurking deep within our souls (Cf. Jer. 17:9)

**4. The Word of God Judges the Thoughts and Attitudes of the Heart.** The word translated “judges” (NIV) doesn’t mean that the Word “condemns” us. It’s the same word that’s translated “discerning” in the ESV. By that the author means that the Word *evaluates* our thoughts and attitudes (or intentions, ESV, NASB), and then *analyzes* them. Are they good or bad, sincere or insincere, honorable or dishonorable? For example, it’s entirely possible for me to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. But the Word sheds light on my thoughts and intentions and reveals whether or not my motives are right or wrong.

That’s what David had in mind when he wrote Psalm 139: “*O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD*” (vv. 1-4).

**5. The Activity of the Word of God and the Activity of God Himself are One and the Same:** “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from His sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account*” (v. 13). At this point, there is a slight shift in our author’s thought. In the words of one commentator, “The fact that the Word of God penetrates, like a sharp sword, to the innermost center of (our) selfhood means that every single detail and aspect of our lives is fully and relentlessly open to the gaze of God (Philip E. Hughes).

Yes, we may fool our friends and even deceive ourselves into thinking that we are Christians. But in the end, nothing is hidden from God’s sight; *everything* is uncovered, and *everyone* must face the final day of reckoning and give an account. This final thought drives home, in the plainest possible language, the necessity to “*make every effort*”to enter God’s rest (4:11). Zeal and perseverance are called for, especially in view of the disaster that follows upon unbelief.

Early in the Pilgrim’s Progress, Christian comes to the foot of a steep hill. At the bottom of the hill, one way turned off to the left and was named Danger. Another way turned to the right and was named Destruction. The narrow way, however, led straight up the side of the hill, which was called Difficulty.

At the time, Formality and Hypocrisy were also traveling with Christian. When they saw that the hill was steep and high and that there were two other ways to go, they thought that the three ways might once again merge on the other side of the hill. So one man took the way of Danger and was led into a giant forest. The other took the way of Destruction and was led into a vast field full of dark mountains, never to be seen again.

But Christian resolved to take the narrow way. He went to a spring and drank from it to refresh himself. Then he began to move up the Hill, echoing the same hope that the author of Hebrews had for his readers, including you and me:

“This Hill, though high, I desire to ascend;

The difficulty will not me offend.

For I perceive the way to life lies here;

Come, be strong, heart, neither faint nor fear.

Better, though difficult, the right way to go,

Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe.”