

“While It Is Still Today, Rest”
Hebrews 4:1–13
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Hebrews 4:1–13 says [1] *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. [2] For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. [3] For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,*

*“As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest,’”*

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. [4] For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” [5] And again in this passage he said,

“They shall not enter my rest.”

[6] Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, [7] again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

*“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”*

[8] For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. [9] So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, [10] for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

[11] Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. [12] For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

What does the Bible say about the Bible? I refer to this text as the Bible on the Bible. To list a few examples of other places you can find these types of texts are II Timothy 3:16–17 which says [16] **All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.** And Isaiah 55:1 which says [11] *so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.* Another that you might not have realized, at least in this context, is Psalm 119 which has 176 verses in it, mainly about the beauty, clarity and the perfectness of God’s Word. Another way of saying Hebrews 4:12 is that God’s Word reads us as we read it.

When preaching from a text of Scripture the Puritans used to call that the ‘fountain head of doctrine’ that flows out of a text and that’s what I hope to accomplish in this study from this passage in Hebrews 4. We are talking about the sufficiency and completeness of the Scriptures for our lives where God has given us everything in His Word for life and godliness. We don’t need to go anywhere else for what we need to navigate life, to direct us in our good times and to direct us in our bad times.

I would hope today that you will have a little deeper understanding and a greater appreciation for Hebrews 4:12–13 because there is a context and context always makes the

Scripture come alive. The context is an Old Testament context that goes back to Numbers 20 and Exodus 17. God has done mighty works for His people. His people had lived as slaves in the land of Egypt and had to make bricks without straw. God came and did a mighty work in their midst. They saw the ten plagues, the night of the Passover and went out by God's mighty hand as they crossed over on dry land through the Red Sea that would later swallow the Egyptian army.

Then they moved in their wilderness wanderings and then one day they were thirsty. They began to grumble, complain and quarrel. Numbers 20:4–5 kind of gives us the context as it hits the nail on the head which says [4] *“Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? [5] And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink.”* After God delivered them from the Egyptians showing them time and time again His mighty hand of power, they called where they were an evil place. God always provided for them as He did in this case. The story gets a little mixed up when God told Moses to do it a certain way and he didn't in which there were consequences for that yet water comes from the rock, none the less, because God is a gracious God. He always provided what we need even in our quarrelling, grumbling and disbelief.

If you compare the two stories in Numbers 20 and Exodus 17 this may well have happened twice where it happens right after they were delivered from the hand of the Egyptians and then before they went into the Promised Land. Not everyone agrees on this but it is possible that we don't just have two records of one story but two different incidences where the issues were the same. What was that issue? It was that they did not obey God. They did not listen to what He had said and promised. The place becomes a place of testing and quarrelling which is the theological meaning of this place. It's the place of Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:7) in the Hebrew. This is mentioned a number of times in the Scriptures.

It's mentioned in Psalm 81:7 which says [7] *In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.* It's mentioned in Psalm 95:7–9 which says [7] *For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, [8] do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, [9] when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.* This is really our call to worship for in worship we're not only called to sing unto the Lord and rejoice in our hearts, but not to harden our hearts and rejoice in His works.

This occurs in Psalm 106:24–25 which says [24] *Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise. [25] They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of the LORD.* If it keeps coming up then I assume that this is important. They did not obey the voice of the Lord. It is mentioned in Hebrews 3:7, 15, 4:3, 5 and 12. The context of Hebrews 3 and 4 really goes back to Hebrews 2 where we hear echoes of Psalm 95. This language is stern and strong. 'Do not harden your hearts. They shall not enter My rest.' This is the consequence of their disobedience is devastating.

Then we get those words in Hebrews 4:11–12 that says [11] *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. [12] For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* I know I'm giving you a lot of stuff here but do your homework on this and these verses will mean all the more to you. Let's make this a little more pointed as we go further in this study.

I'm not necessarily good at alliterations but this text just happened to have some alliteration in it. There are three words that seem to resonate through this passage that help us understand how important it is for us to hear and obey God's Word. The first word is rebellion. Over and over again their disobedience is called rebellion. Hebrews 3:8 says [8] *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness.* Hebrews 3:15 and 4:7 says, *As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."* Hebrews 3:16 says [16] *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*

There are other words that describe that rebellion. Words like, an evil, an unbelieving heart (Hebrews 3:12), the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13), disobedience (Hebrews 3:18, 4:6, 11) and unbelief (Hebrews 3:19). There was a prayer in the worship folder that fit so beautifully with this because of two words that are used in it. It says;

Lord God, Eternal and Almighty Father, I confess and acknowledge that I am a sinner and guilty of **treason** against Your Holy Law, that I was conceived in sin and prone to do evil and that I have both offended You and **rebelled** against You. I have left undone those things I ought to have done, and have done those things which I ought not to have done. I am unable to save myself, O Lord, and acknowledge that salvation is of Your grace and mercy, so may you receive all the praise as is due Your holy name. For from You and unto You are all things; so unto You be glory forevermore. Amen.

When we do not obey we are in rebellion. We are committing high treason because we do not believe what God has said and we do not act upon it, put it into practice and that is rebellion. Nothing exposes our rebellion more than the Word of God itself that we rebel against. If we stay in the Word it is sharper than a two edged sword and is able to pierce to the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. I see this happen in my life and other people's lives.

I'm going to give you a disclaimer right now because you trust me with a lot of stuff as the counseling pastor here at Briarwood. I'm going to tell a few stories in this study and if you think I'm talking about you or someone you know, the names have been changed and some of the things in the story to protect them. They always say in case studies you're supposed change at least five things about the story but the stories are none the less true.

To give a story on the issue of rebellion, there was a young man who grew up in our church. If you wanted to take a picture of a person who was the ideal person growing up in the church being involved in a lot of what they could be involved with, he was it. He was a leader in the church. He was a great student, a good athlete and received scholarships to go to various colleges. Then he went off to college, doing pretty well his first year and then temptation became too much for him so it wasn't long after that he began to do things he should not have done. He began to partake in a lot of sin and it wasn't long before there was a crash and burn incident in his life. He was in trouble with his parents, his school, lost his scholarships, in trouble with the civil authorities and had to come home in disgrace.

We were concerned about him and so we prayed for him. Two of our elders went and visited with him to pastor and shepherd him well. When the elders came back to report to me how it went they said he was so angry at them and blamed them for all that happened to him. One of the elders told him 'you need to read Psalm 51 and think about what you are saying and thinking because you sound a lot like David when he was confronted with his sin. Hear what it says about what you're supposed to do about your sin.' The young man agreed and we continued to pray for him. A couple of days later when he came to see me he was still in the

same frame of mind. He goes on this long tirade how none of this was his fault and he hadn't done anything wrong. I just let him go on and on.

When he was finished he said to me 'one of the elders just beat me over the head with Psalm 51, so what do you think about that?' I said 'I think you need to read Psalm 51 and I think you need to go home and spend a few days in Psalm 32 as well.' Psalm 51 and 32 are a lot alike for they both show us how we're supposed to repent and how God can restore to us the joy of our salvation. A few days later he came back to my office and I could tell when he walked through the door by the look on his face that something had changed. He sat down on a chair in my office and began to weep. God used both those Psalms to expose his heart. He began to talk about how remorseful he was, how he regretted what he had done, he poured out his heart in confession and asked for prayer.

Stories don't always have happy endings for this young man came back to my office many times. I spent about three years with this young man and there were times when he came back where he was a lot like he was before God broke him. The old man has a way of raising his ugly head in our lives and we can always make excuses, can't we? Over time God broke him time and time again with His Word and remade him into the man He was making him into before his rebellion and nothing exposes our inward and outward rebellion against God than His Word. Our text for this study all are naked and exposed in His sight to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. So that is the first word from this text, rebellion.

The second word and the antithesis to the first word, is the word rest. Hebrews 4:3 tells us that we who believe enter that rest. Hebrews 4:9-11 says [9] *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, [10] for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. [11] Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.* God is not just talking about a future rest but also a present rest. We don't earn either of those but in our obedience there is rest.

When I read verse 11 I thought how do we strive and rest? It sounds contradictory because if you're striving then you're not resting. It's not the right way to look at it because sometimes we do have to strive to rest. There are things in the Christian life that are difficult to do but they yield rest and peace inwardly. Obedience is simple and that's why it's so hard but we often times choose disobedience. There are things that are hard in the beginning that seem to get easier but there still is a peace that passes all understanding. Rest is what we find in obedience. God's Word breaks the tension of our lives.

As a Biblical counselor I often times give homework assignments. I started to title this study 'The Dog Didn't Eat Your Homework, You Just Didn't Do It.' I had one counselee who came to me one time and he was so low, so down where he just kind of melted into the seat in despair as I talked to him. You could see it in his countenance. I gave him some encouragement and I also gave him some homework. I am very fond of the Psalms of lament for I think they are a language we need to relearn and practice better in the church so I gave him some Psalms of lament to read at home. I told him when he came back we'd go through them together. He left and then came back about a week later.

When he came back he was still about as low as one could be. I asked him if he did his homework and he said 'no, I just didn't have the strength to do it.' I said 'Let's do it right now.' I asked him to read one and then I would read one but he said he couldn't do it so he let me read it for him. I think that you're never too old to be read to no matter what your age. As I was reading the Psalm all of sudden I could see that things were changing in the way he looked. It

didn't solve everything that day but he was a different man by the end of the hour than he was at the beginning. He said 'That was just what I needed. I'm so glad I came to see you today.'

I did not say this but I was thinking 'You had it a week ago and all you had to do was read it to yourself. You didn't have to wait for me to read it to you.' God chooses to work when He wants to work but that's what I mean about rest, where God's Word always gives us direction and comfort when we need it most. This man literally went from a man in pain and despair to a man who breathed a sigh of relief as I read the Psalms. He literally rested in his chair as he was much more relaxed and at peace than when he came in.

The third word is actually the word today but to make it an 'r' word, it's 'right now.' So there is rebellion, rest and right now. Psalm 95:1–2 says [1] *Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!* [2] *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!* Right now in worship the real issue before us is hearing and obeying the Word of God. The same two choices are still before us – right now either rebellion or rest. Which will you strive for right now?

Right now God wants to soothe your sorrows and sanctify your successes, if you would but hear His Word, while it's still today. Right now would you not rest in what God says to you? John Piper says "The Christian life is a life of day by day, hour by hour trust in the promises of God to help us, guide us, take care of us and bring us into a future of holiness and joy that will satisfy our hearts infinitely more than if we forsake Him and put our trust in ourselves or in the promises of this world." That day by day, hour by hour trust is not automatic. It is the result of daily diligence and proper fear.

Here is one more story. I love telling this one. Meet my friend Jody, he is eight years old. If I told you all of Jody's story you would be crying with me by the end. Jody has had more hardship in his first eight years than most people experience in a lifetime. His mother is doing the best she can with him but I must say that Jody's father is a cruel and wicked man. Jody's mother therefore now lives with her parents, with Jody and his brothers and sisters. One of the reasons this story resonates with me is he calls his grandfather who is a good man and the best man in his life right now, Papa and that's why my grandchildren call me.

When Jody first starting coming to me he was so afraid of what had happened to him would happen again or other things happening to him that he was having nightmares. He had begun to write the nightmares down and I had not originally given him that assignment. In my office I have my chair and two other chairs and when he came in I said to him, 'Pick a chair to sit in' and he picked my chair, the one behind my desk. So I just sat in one of the other chairs and we just started talking. He always now sits in my chair when he comes to see me. I looked at his notebook and gave him some verses which I had printed out for him. His homework assignment when he left was to continue to write down his nightmares and then I challenged him to write down his good dreams as well. I also told him that every time he writes down one of his dreams I wanted him to write down one of the verses that I had given him.

As I was telling him this he was looking up on my wall and mouthing something. I was trying to figure out what he was mouthing and he then said 'Write down that one for me too.' It was Aaron's benediction in Numbers 6:24–26 which says [24] *The LORD bless you and keep you;* [25] *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;* [26] *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.* So when he came in for his second visit, he sat in my chair, gave me his notebook and he had done exactly what I asked him to do, his homework. In fact, I thought I need to show this to some of my adult counselees just to show them how this is supposed to work.

He said to me ‘When I write my verses down I say them out loud.’ I gave him a few more verses and I noticed something. I said ‘Jody you now have more verses than you have nightmares and dreams.’ He just smiled. He also said ‘I love my God songs.’ I said ‘What are God songs?’ “Songs about God! But I need some more.” I told him I would try to help him find some more for him to sing. He said ‘When I can’t remember any I just make them up.’ I said ‘Really? You make up God songs?’ “Yes, sir!” I said ‘What are some of your God songs?’ “One of them I’m working on is ‘God Will Fight for You.’”

Do you believe that? God will fight for you. Do you believe that there are enough verses in the Bible to soothe the fears of your nightmares and sanctify all of your dreams? I do. I may not know where they are but I’m here to help you find them. Today, right now, is God’s Word sufficient for you? More importantly do you demonstrate your confidence in God’s Word by hearing it right now? I want to now give you some takeaways that are practical suggestions, ways you can take them and run with them. How do we do this? I’m going to give you some pointers.

The first one is display the Word in your home. We put up a lot of other things in our home and we certainly ought to put up the Word of God in our homes and if you have children encourage them to make you some Scripture art. You can certainly go to places and buy plaques and pictures that have been done, but involve your children and put it on your refrigerator. Hang it on the mirror. I have index cards in my desk that I give out and encourage people to write Scripture down and carry it with them. Make it where you have to bump into the Word of God all the time. Don’t let yourself get away from it.

Secondly, read the Word aloud to yourself and others. Husbands, when was the last time you read the Word to your wife. Make that a daily practice. Fathers, read it aloud at the supper table. That’s an aspect of our devotional life we don’t do a lot of. The Word of God is meant to be read aloud. Enjoy the promise of Psalm 1:1–2 which says *[1] Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.* Meditate means to mumble to yourself, to muse over it, to say it out loud, to say it to your heart and mind. Also say it to others.

Thirdly, share the Word with others, with love, gentleness and humility. In the context of this Hebrews 4 passage that is what we have. Hebrews 3:12–13 says *[12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* We are to treat one another as brothers and sisters. We are also told to exhort which means to call alongside of, encourage and it doesn’t mean getting in someone’s face or on their back. Encourage them with the Word. Exhort one another every day.

This is a simple sermon but hard to live out because there are a lot of competing voices in our lives. The sad thing about it in the day and age in which we live is that many of us will spend more time filling out the latest personality profile that we have seen on FaceBook than we will meditating on God’s Word. If you want to know yourself, you will find that you will know yourself a lot better when you’re exposed by the Word of God than any profile you will ever do. Husbands if you want to learn your wife’s love language read Ephesians 5 for that is her love language and it should be yours as well. *[25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25). Think about what that looks like in her life and how it’s been revealed to you in the Scriptures.

There are a lot of ways we get around this. We avoid it. So today, right now, rebellion or rest? The Word of God has been sung, read and explained so I ask you, what will it be rebellion or rest, right now? This week as you face life will you read God's Word, hear God's Word, read it into your life and share God's Word with others? May God help us to do that all the more. If you want to be able to share the Word of God with others I'll be glad to help you be able to do that. I'd love to have that opportunity and that joy. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we pray that You would help us to read Your Word, believe Your Word, obey Your Word, share Your Word and pray Your Word. As we go about our daily lives may we choose the rest that is offered to us in Your Word. Forgive us Father for our rebellion. Help us to hear and do for we pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.