

Hebrews 4:1-13

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2016

Preacher: David Helm

- [0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's great to have you here today and hope to bring a word that will warm your heart as you're sitting here this morning.
- Everybody is looking for a little rest. In fact, the word rest at times is used as the summation or goal of life.
- I was at a funeral of a 16-year-old a little over a week ago. One of the largest funerals I've ever attended.
- Must have been 800 people easily. And the indicator summarizing the goal of life in three words.
- Our desire, our heart cry, rest in peace. We think of rest as a daily or weekly need.
- [1 : 12] We think of when am I going to get my day off. That's when I'll catch up on a little rest. Oh, when the weekend comes, I plan on sleeping a little bit because I'm going to get my rest.
- Big day tomorrow. Better go to bed early so I get my rest. What are you doing this summer? Well, I'm taking a holiday a week away so I can get some rest.
- Oh, to be in the academy where you might get a full-fledged sabbatical. You know, it is a time of rest. Even the close of life will put you in a home called rest.
- The writer to the Hebrews is a preacher who at this moment in his message has a rest that he does not want you to miss out on.
- The whole weight and force of the text is there, is it not? Reiterated that we might see the emphasis. Verse 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 : 39] And then, as if the wind of his lungs is rising in verse 11, let us therefore strive to enter that rest. This is what he wants.
- Everyone to arrive at rest. Notice, though, it's not my rest. It's not your rest. It's not our rest. It's God's rest.
- That's the quotation from the psalm that is reiterated throughout. You'll see it at the end of verse 3. They shall not enter my rest. God promises that he has a rest for you.
- It's not like your day off or your weekend. It's not like my upcoming holiday to London that you wish you could be on with me. No, it's not like those things.
- It's not like a sabbatical. It's not like space. It's not like catching up on sleep. It's a rest that belongs to God. It remains then for the author to find out in his own mind how he will convince you to get hold of God's rest.
- [3 : 55] That's what the text does. We know what the text wants. A healthy fear in the reader so that you'll arrive at rest.
- A striving in the reader to arrive at rest. But the question is how? It's always the question. How does one convince anyone to arrive at a stated end? Let me put it to you this way in a series of simple questions.

If you're in grade school here today, I know we've got some grade school folk. Imagine it's the summer. You're inside watching one of those boring cartoons with your siblings or a friend or two.

And it happened to be a beautiful day. You sat there wondering how can I convince these around me to get outside and play.

What you say at that point is your effort to get them to come with you to that goal.

[5 : 06] What if you're in junior high? How you go about ends is important. You might have one remaining group project left in school this year.

Perhaps it's a debate. The question will be posed. Should college education be free for all? And the teacher has divided you into pro and con groups.

And your group will have to make an argument to persuade your classmates of a particular view. You have that which you want to accomplish.

The question is always how do you go about it? I love group projects. My kids tend to hate them. I love them because I knew somebody who was really smart was going to carry me through the finish line.

They hate them because they end up carrying kids like me. Perhaps you're in high school. You sit down to take your AP English exam and the prompt is there.

[6 : 10] You've got to read two and a half pages of a Toni Morrison novel. And the prompt is to indicate the means by which she persuades you of the legitimacy of her characters.

Well, what you will be entertaining then is how Toni magically convinces you to come along with her.

Perhaps you're a first year undergrad. You're in philosophy 101. And the question now will be who will they introduce you to? That is the father of all rhetoric and logic.

And what are the three primary means by which we persuade anyone to do anything? Perhaps you're always concerned with how it gets done. Perhaps you're a mother standing in your condo this week looking at your little one and wanting all the things to be picked up.

That's your goal. But what you say at that point will be an argument made to help them arrive at your stated end.

[7 : 21] Perhaps you're an NBA coach and you coach for the Raptors today or the Miami Heat and you're in the locker room at halftime. One of you will be down.

You will at that moment come up with a speech that is intended to motivate your team to victory and the advancement into the next round.

How we arrive... How we arrive... Well, we give our lives to questions like this. You're in the workplace wishing beyond hope that your colleagues would treat you better.

And you're sorting out your talking points that might gain your stated end. The writer to the Hebrews has an end in mind that we would not miss arrival at rest.

And what the text does then is reveal the means by which he would persuade us. There are three.

[8 : 32] Simply stated, he makes an argument from Canaan. He'll make an argument from creation. And he'll make an argument regarding consummation.

And in fact, when he does so, he actually utilizes what Aristotle would have put forward. An argument from pathos.

From an argument that brings forth emotive force. An argument from ethos. The credibility and the integrity of the rest that he would have you hold on to.

And an argument from logos. The logic and the power of the word itself. All of these things are engaged in these three short points. So if the goal is this.

That you and I would be shaken from our shallow considerations of rest. That are all ours. To a grand consideration of entering into a rest that God has.

[9 : 35] That is his rest. These are the means by which you would be persuaded. First, an argument concerning the land of Canaan.

Or put differently, an argument that looks at Israel's failure in the wilderness. As an emotive way of motivating them.

Verse 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.

That's the argument. He is appealing to the emotional capacity within the reader. To consider the memory of Israel's hard history.

At a particular time when they were in the wilderness. And they rejected God. And therefore did not enter into rest. That is they did not enter into Canaan. And they died.

[10 : 38] They were buried. The them of verse 2. Just as to them. Is a reference to Israel in the wilderness.

Chapter 3 verse 16 to 19. Where we read. For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?

And with whom was he provoked for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest?

But to those who were disobedient. So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. He wants you to enter into the rest of God.

And that you would secure it. He forces you to look back on a people who had a promised rest and failed to enter it. It's like a coach in a locker room that plays a video of a team that failed to execute and therefore lost.

[11 : 46] And he says, we do not want to be like them. He's appealing to all the emotional force. I do not want to be the people in the wilderness. I do not want to be the answer to that threefold rhetorical question in 16 to 19.

For who were those? Oh! Those of unbelief. And with whom was he? Oh! That would have been those whose bodies fell. And to whom did he swear?

Oh! That people in Israel that hardened their heart. With rhetorical force, the writer says to you, consider the memory of Israel who had a particular rest called Canaan.

And they never entered it. And may that motivate you to a healthy fear. Lest you fail to enter God's rest. Now, using Israel's hard history as an example of what not to do is a very common tool for biblical writers.

Moses will often reference Israel's rebellion, as will Joshua. They'll look back to a people who failed to motivate a fixed commitment of those in the present.

[13 : 15] The Psalms do this repeatedly. Using the history of a people to motivate a different outcome. The prophets will do this throughout.

Jesus actually does this in John 6 when he references the failure of Israel to actually know what it was they should have been looking for.

And his desire that the people in his day would accept his own message. Stephen does this in his sermon, his last sermon while he was killed. He uses Israel's unbelieving history to motivate a different outcome in his own day.

The epistles do this. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 talks about how Israel is an example. This is a very common tool. It takes place in the workplace. It takes place in the academy.

It takes place in the home. Now, Johnny, you do realize that I had to discipline your brother yesterday because he did not pick up his toys.

[14 : 15] Would you like to pick up your toys? What are you doing? And you're evoking the memory of a failed history to motivate better behavior in the present.

As the writer to the Hebrews would say to the people, there is a rest of God. He uses Canaan as his negative footprint. And says, don't be like them.

What about you and me? I could list entire denominations that represent a failed history of a people to retain and hold fast to a confession of faith.

I could go to lives of men, women, students who have sat under the hearing of the gospel in this place over 18 years, who no longer hold fast to that rest.

I could speak of acquaintances who once frequented churches, but when the difficulties of life and the loss of loved ones came so close and near, they would look me in the eye and say, Pastor, don't talk to me of the resurrection at this coming funeral, for I no longer hold it to be true.

[15 : 56] So the waters of life have overwhelmed me. I know that there is a people, a person in your own past, whose rejection, ultimately, whose rejection and rebellion against the rest that God has for them in Christ is already a thing of their past.

And it ought to put into each of us, not a judgment that we lay down upon them, but a fear that would rise up within us, for it can happen to anyone.

Take these words for what they are. Let us fear, lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For the good news came to us just as to them.

What a wonderful thing we could talk about for a half an hour there. That's the good news of the gospel, that the good news is actually a news that was prior to what you and I understand as the gospel itself.

The good news came that if you received the word of God by faith and walked forward with Him, He would be their God and they would be His people. The second argument, though, He moves from this argument of pathos in reference to Canaan and Israel's failure in the wilderness to an argument rooted in creation.

[17 : 37] And not to Israel's wilderness years, but to God's way of working in those initial days. Verses 3 through 10 all involve elements related to creation.

Notice how verse 3 ends. Although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. There's a reference to the way God was working at the very beginning.

You'll see it there, verse 4. For He has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all His works. He's appealing now to a Genesis account at creation.

You'll see it again there at the end of verse 10. For whoever has entered into God's rest has also rested from His works as God did from His. Three times we're considering the works of God which effectuated or rolled into His rest as an argument for you to make sure you get yours or His which is coming.

Now, this is a very sophisticated argument in the text and I don't plan to try to teach you all the terms of the argument. What I want you to know though is that He's moved to an argument more generally rooted in what we would think of as ethos.

[19 : 12] It's that there's an integrity to my argument on rest. The argument I have about don't forgetting God's rest is something that God actually established in creation. There's credibility to the rest I want you to gain.

As God worked and then finished His work and commenced His rest, so too that's what ought to give you moving to make sure you get yours. In other words, I'm not asking you to look at Israel in the wilderness.

I'm asking you now to look at God's way of working taking you all the way back to creation. God Himself is proof that such a rest exists.

Now, three takeaways from those middle verses. Three things that I think are important for you to at least know by way of this message. What is meant by rest in this part of the argument?

We know what was meant by rest in the first part. Canaan. What is meant by rest through an appeal to creation? Secondly, what is that rest going to be made available to us?

[20 : 27] When do we get this creation kind of rest? And then finally, what's it going to look like? Well, let me just look at them quickly.

What is meant by God's rest at creation? Not a divine cessation of activity.

It's not as though God worked six days and then stopped. And when it says He finished His work and rested, you do not get the image of divine cessation of activity.

What you should read instead is that when He finished the six days, there wasn't so much a cessation of divine activity, but a commencement of His rule over all that He had already created.

Think of a father in a house. Use this illustration. Years ago, teaching through Genesis, who was, in a sense, over the whole house. I've been in homes where a father will have a big old chair with an ottoman.

[21 : 33] Now, when the father is sitting in his chair and he's got his feet up on his ottoman, that doesn't mean he's inactive. It means he's ruling.

Right? He may be having his eyes closed, but he's ruling. This is what happens at Genesis. When God finishes creating, He rules.

In other words, God's rest could be equal to God ruling. To enter into His rest is to enter into life under His rule.

That's what it means. So what that means is that what God started in Genesis is still ongoing. This is why Jesus says, I'm still working.

My Father's working. See, people began to get a misunderstanding of what Jesus was doing when He was working. In other words, He was exercising the rule of God in the world.

[22 : 37] And so, what He's arguing here about what is meant by rest at creation, it doesn't mean that God was done and finished. It means having done, everything is now begun.

God's rest is life under God's rule. And that's the rest that is offered to you. And while it started at creation, it's available to you now.

That's why He quotes here from the Davidic element in verse 7. He appoints a certain day today, saying through David so long afterward, like long after creation, it was still a today word that you should not be hardening your heart.

Let me put it to you this way. If you want the rest of God, what it means is you would be beginning to live under His rule. and that is offered to you today.

Today is the day of salvation. Now there will become a day when it will not be offered to you. But if you want something better than a day off or a weekend, if you want something better than a week away or a sabbatical, if you want to live in a way where you are rightly related to your Creator and purposefully at work for Him in all you do, then you have to enter through Christ who secured that rest for you.

- [24 : 29] That's what's offered to you today. What is meant by His rest at creation? The beginning of His rule. When is that made available to us?
- Well, today. What will that rest look like? A reordering of your life under the Word of Christ. His priorities become yours. His ways become yours. Well, two arguments done.
- One to go before I sat down. Having made an argument from Canaan, having expanded that way beyond Canaan to a rest that is available to you ever since the beginning of creation.
- He now moves finally to a third argument, a logical argument, a word argument that would fall with incredible force and it relates in some measure to what will happen to us at the consummation.
- [25 : 56] Look at verse 12 and 13. For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. what is this Word of God in verse 12?
- Well, tightly, of course, it's these quotes that come from Psalms on rest and not hardening your heart. More generally, though, it comes from even the Genesis illusion here.
- In particular, the Word of God is in reference to all that he has revealed to himself and inscripturated for them. I mean, do you remember the surprising words we saw a week ago in Hebrews 3 7?
- Take a look again. The opening five words. Stunning. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says. Two surprises there for me. One, it's the Holy Spirit.
- [27 : 13] He doesn't say as the psalmist says. He doesn't say as the Bible says. He doesn't say as the scriptures say. He says, as the Holy Spirit says. In other words, the writer to the Hebrews equates the inscripturated word given to Israel as the word of the Holy Spirit.
- Which is why, if you want to hear a word from God today, read your Bible out loud. Because it's actually the Spirit's voice inscripturated in texts.
- and the second surprise is the present tense. As the Holy Spirit says, and then he quotes a long ago written down word, that when you read these ancient words, they are yet today, present tense, what God would say to the church.
- Now, that's where he's arrived at his argument. This is a logical argument. This is a word argument that's not based on the emotion of looking to a people's failed history.
- That's not based on just the positive emulation of what God began at creation by the way of his own working. This is an argument that says the word of God itself has been true.
- [28 : 30] Those didn't get into his rest just as he said. And those who do believe did enter his rest just as he will give them today. That his word holds it all.
- It's the most amazing thing. When you and I normally think of this, if you've grown up in churches and you've had someone pull these two verses out of the Bible, verses 12 and 13, we normally pull them out of the context to say something about the scriptures in a very encouraging way.
- Oh, let me tell you what the word of God is like. It's living, active. We begin to lay out all of its characteristics. But did you notice the emphasis of the characteristics?
- It's sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the division of soul and spirit. This word is dangerous.
- This word cuts to the interior makeup of your heart, actually to your thoughts, to your intentions. And it's a word where no creature is hidden. Notice the pronoun change here.

[29 : 37] Not from its sight, but from his sight. The word of God has actually been personified in the text. That when you stand before the word of God, you stand before it, but you stand before him?

And then he moves on. No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

It's an argument from consummation. Let me put it to you this way. We live in a world where people will always ask, but what do you think of the Bible? Oh, I think the Bible is a document that was written over many centuries by people from various views, and it's like any other kind of literature.

That's what I think of the Bible. What are your thoughts on the Bible? Well, I have a lot of problems with the Bible. I've been thinking about the Bible, and it doesn't seem to square with many of the things I would like to think would be true.

According to the text, the question isn't, what do you think about the Bible? What it thinks about you.

[31 : 00] The chief concern is not what you have to say about it, it's what it has to say about you. And remember that the word of God inscripturated is hinted at here to be personified, personified.

It didn't roll with the end. And the word personified squares with everything the Bible teaches concerning the word made flesh to whom all will be accountable.

I could say to you, come unto Jesus, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and he will give you rest. Or I could say to you, he will appear as one flashing like a victorious warrior whose mouth, would you see it, would be like a flaming sword that would devour and cut and judge.

That's an argument worth considering. It's an argument then from Canaan that would have us look to Israel's past.

An argument from creation that by strange implication has you look to a rest that you can have in the present. In an argument from consummation that if you don't take today, you will give an account for on that day.

[32 : 49] I offer you today rest, says the writer to the Hebrews. A rest that is God's rest, meaning God's way, God's rule, life the way he intended it.

You can take it, you can reject it, but remember this, come that day, you will be accountable to it.

It will not be accountable to you. God's love the Father, help us then to have a healthy fear and a holy striving to believe, to believe, to have faith that we can be rightly related to you.

May we not lay that aside and encourage each one toward your ways in Jesus' name.

Amen.