

Build Your Life on the Word of God (Hebrews 4:1-13)

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[0 : 00] Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. You may make your way to the back. My goodness, that is a lot of kids making their way to the back. And what a joy it is to see as they're making their way to go learn about Jesus.

It's always encouraging when Savannah shares what they're going through in Children's Church, how they're learning about Scripture. They're not just, you know, taking a story here and there. They're walking through Scripture.

They've already gone through the entire Bible in the last year and a half or so. I was thinking, I was like, if I make it through the entire Bible at the pace that we're going through Hebrews, it may be 10 or 15 years before we do that.

They've gone through the whole thing in a year and a half. And it's just a joy to hear all of those questions that come as they come home and talk about what they've learned in Children's Church. But today we're going to be continuing in our study of the book of Hebrews. We're going to be in Hebrews chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. But throughout our study of the book of Hebrews thus far, we've seen and heard some pretty remarkable statements about who Christ is.

[1 : 09] We've seen some pretty remarkable statements about who Jesus is, what He came to do, some things that He accomplished while He was here. We've seen that Jesus is the Son of God.

We've seen that He's the revelation of God. We've seen that He's the fulfillment of God's revelation in the Old Testament, the heir of all things, the agent of creation, the radiance of God's glory.

And that's just the first three verses of Hebrews. And then as we continue through Hebrews, we've seen that He is far superior than the angels. He's greater than Moses. He's greater than anything else in all of creation, as much superior as the builder of the house is than the house itself.

We were called to consider Jesus, to pay close attention to who He is so that we don't miss who He is. And now this week, we are seeing why this is so important, why this is such a big deal in our relationship with God.

And so if you have a copy of God's Word with you this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 4. And we're going to read the first 13 verses together today.

[2 : 22] Hebrews chapter 4, starting in verse 1, says this, 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.

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.

For we who believed entered that rest, as He has said, As I swore my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Although His works were finished from the foundation of the world, for He has somewhere spoken on the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all His works.

And again, in this passage, He said, They shall not enter my rest. Since, therefore, it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again He points 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.

[3 : 39] For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from His works, as God did from His. Let us, therefore, strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

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. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed in the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. This passage is a somewhat difficult passage to consider all that is being said, But this morning, I wanted to break it up into three questions that I feel like the author is begging us to ask as we go through this.

And so the first question to begin with that I want us to ask is, what are we to fear? What are we to fear? Verse, we get this in the first five verses, but verse one right here says, 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.

[5 : 10] I almost feel like a broken record as we've gone through the book of Hebrews. And I keep telling you, whenever you see a therefore, make sure that you pay attention to what it is therefore. But if you just take a quick glance at the book of Hebrews so far, you'll see over and over again the use of the word therefore.

In fact, in our study today, that's how we're going to be breaking up our passage is going from therefore to therefore and asking these questions and seeking to try to find what God is telling us. This passage is telling us that we should fear. But it's also telling us to go back to the first or the last two verses of chapter three, where it says, Now, if you have certain translations, they won't use fear here in this next passage, in this next verse in chapter one of, or chapter four, verse one, and they might use afraid, but sometimes they use the word be careful.

Now, I want you to be careful if your translation uses be careful, because I don't want it to take away from the gravity of what the author is trying to communicate here. The author is telling us to be afraid, to fear this.

The passage is telling us to fear. This seems almost counterintuitive when you look at the rest of Scripture. Because when you look throughout Scripture, you see over and over again the word of God telling us, don't be afraid.

[6 : 50] In fact, so many of the commands that we see throughout Scripture are don't be afraid, fear not, don't be anxious. And it's telling us over and over again not to be afraid. In fact, when you look at the Great Commission, and when Jesus is telling us to go and make disciples of all nations, the final thing he says, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

And it's implying here that what he's asking them to do is a big task. But he's saying, hey, it's all right because I'm going to be with you for this.

I'm going to walk with you through this. And so we see over and over again we're told not to be afraid. But this passage clearly tells us to be afraid.

And what we are fearing has very serious consequences. The passage says, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

The it here is God's rest. The restful refuge of salvation. Be afraid so that you don't miss God's rest.

[7 : 58] But what is it that we are to fear that will cause us to miss God's rest? And like we said, the previous verse in chapter 3 is most helpful with this.

Where it says, so we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, fear that unbelief because that is what will keep you from entering God's rest.

Fear that unbelief because that is what will prevent you from entering God's rest. John Piper once said, he says, normal Christian life is aware of the fearful danger of unbelief, but it does not live paralyzed or terrorized by it.

It lives in faith. So let us humbly go to this text and ask a very logical question that comes from this. As believers, are we supposed to live our lives in fear of missing heaven? As believers, are we supposed to live our lives in fear of missing heaven?

[9 : 03] And before we answer that, I want you to consider what the author has already told us back in chapter 2. If you would look back over to chapter 2, starting in verse 14, it says this, since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things that through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

You see, clearly Christ died to deliver us from this slavish fear. Christ wants us to be a fearless people. Christ not only broke the curse of sin, that is death, but he also delivered us from the devil who leverages that fear of death over us to keep us enslaved.

Jesus' death set us free not only from sin, but also from the fear of death. And this should change our lives because you can really live for Christ only when you understand that death has no power over you.

Then it gives you the power to live for him. He wants us to share with our neighbors. He wants us to share with our coworkers, with our classmates, without fear.

Christ wants us to go to unreached people groups all over the world without fear. Faith in the promises of God makes you fearless before the threats of men.

[10:38] And so in short, what we're seeing here is one thing to fear is not believing the promises that make you fearless. And so one of the things that we're seeing here is that we should fear is not believing in the promises that make you fearless.

The warning here is against unbelief. He is talking to the church and so it seems that some within the church that may have professed Christ at some point, but it is clear that their actions show that they are not followers of Christ because they are following something else.

So the author is saying, he says, you need to be afraid because there is a lot at stake in not believing. You see, perseverance is the evidence that you truly belong to Christ.

In other words, following Christ is the evidence that you are a follower of Christ. Following Christ is the evidence that you are actually a follower of Christ.

Those who are truly saved, who have truly placed their faith and their trust in Jesus, those who have seen that Jesus is far greater than anything and everything in this world are the ones who persevere.

[11:52] They are the ones who follow Jesus. And so we are to fear that unbelief, but we also see here there's a sense of urgency in this passage. I don't know if you picked up on it as we first read through it, but looking back at verse 1 again, it says, therefore, 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.

While the promise of entering his rest still stands. It seems that some Jews were in danger of talking themselves out of trusting in Christ because they may have thought they had missed it. They had missed the coming Messiah. They realized that while he was here, they didn't see him as the coming Messiah. They didn't see him for who he truly is and they missed it. And so now they're afraid that, well, maybe I've just messed up.

Maybe I have messed up and we've just missed this and we can't come to faith in Christ anymore.

The author is saying, you have no reason to believe this because this offer still stands for you.

This offer still stands. As John MacArthur notes, he says, they did have reason to be afraid. Not because they had lost the opportunity for salvation, but because they could lose it if they continued to put off accepting Christ as their personal Savior.

[13:19] Yes, be afraid. Not because of living a life that prevents you from coming to faith in Christ, but because there will come a day when that is no longer an option.

If you think you've missed your opportunity, then let me tell you, if you have breath in your lungs, if you have breath in your lungs, you can accept Christ as your Savior.

This week, I was reading a story, a biography of Mel Trotter. I don't know if many of you probably haven't heard of Mel Trotter before, but Mel Trotter in the latter half of his life was an incredibly gifted Bible teacher.

And not only was he an incredibly gifted Bible teacher, but he also spent much of his life reaching out to the community in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Reaching out and serving God and providing hope, providing food for many who were suffering.

But that came on the heels of a life spent living for himself. That came on the heels of a life spent where he was very much focused on on him and whatever he wanted.

[14:29] For much of his life, Mel had a drinking problem that was as bad of a problem as you could possibly imagine. His children starved because of his, spent his money on alcohol.

In fact, his daughter died of malnutrition at the age of four because they had no money for food because anything and everything that they had, Mel spent on buying more alcohol and trying to focus on himself in fact, when his daughter died, the neighbors came together and they pulled their money together so that they could provide a burial for the little girl.

And so they, they pulled their money together, bought a casket, bought a set of clothes for her to be buried in. But, Mel broke into the mortuary, stole the clothes off of his daughter and traded it in for another drink.

attention before or if God's word is living and active like we're about to hear.

[20 : 42] But verse 10 this week hit me like a ton of bricks. It says this, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

What a beautiful picture of the gospel in a single phrase. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

You see this verse powerfully captures the gospel in a single phrase. The gospel is not morality, it's not external religion, it's not checking all the right boxes, saying just the right words in the right order.

The gospel is the message of Christ's accomplishments on our behalf so that we might rest from our works by trusting in his work.

You see, the gospel is the message of Christ's accomplishments on our behalf so that we might rest from our works by trusting in his work.

[21 : 48] When we trust in Christ, we are resting in his work. Jesus says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Here's the good news. In Jesus, God gives us a righteousness that we do not have and that we cannot earn on our own. This saving righteousness is received by faith.

It's not something you can earn, and once you have it, it's not something that you can lose. And so the question becomes, what is your faith in? Is it in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross? Or is it in your own works that you're seeking to try to earn God's favor by doing enough good to outweigh your bad? Our works are nothing but filthy rags.

[22 : 54] Christ's work is the work that is finished. It's the work that saves. It's the only one that has the power to save. Here recently, I've gotten to have several incredibly encouraging conversations with different people.

Recently, someone who is taking these warnings that the author is saying very seriously. Don't just be a face in the crowd but be a disciple.

Their testimony was very similar to mine. I grew up in church. I grew up with seeing their friends walk the aisle, make professions of faith, and then all of a sudden you realize, you know what, it's probably my turn next.

And so just walking the aisle because you see all of your friends doing it. And this person says, look, I realize that I haven't done this. I haven't actually placed my faith and trust in Jesus.

What I was doing was just something to fit in with the rest of the crowd, with my friends. It was what it was expected of me to do. But now I'm following Christ and so I want to be obedient.

[23 : 58] And it's these conversations like this that are incredibly encouraging but also that give greatness to this, making sure that we fear lest any of us should seem to have failed to reach it.

the very serious question that we must all ask is this, what is my faith in? And it's my prayer that, is it in a prayer that I said at one time that really hasn't changed my life?

Is it in a baptism that I did because my friends were doing it? Or is my faith in Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross that actually has the power to save because this is the only one that has power.

What are we to fear? Not believing the promises of God. What are we to put our faith in, the finished work of Christ? Now finally I want us to consider what is our foundation built on?

What is our foundation built on? Verse 11 says, let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

[25 : 09] 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, 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 account. Verse 11 begins to bring this home for us.

We have been told to fear unbelief. We've been told where to place our trust and our faith. Now we are told the why. In light of what is just said, let us make every effort to enter his rest.

We must not be like the Israelites in the wilderness, but rather we must strive to enter his rest. In other words, we must work at resting.

We must work at resting. This means that we must work against all our efforts to prove our righteousness. We must work against all of our efforts to try to think that we can be good enough, that we can earn favor from God by our works.

[26 : 19] We must work against all our efforts to justify ourselves. And we do this through God's word. We do this through, as we mentioned last week, encouraging one another, keeping each other accountable.

this is one of the things that we do each week in corporate worship. When we hear God's word proclaimed, it should be encouraging us to put our faith in Jesus, to trust him more.

This is what we do when we sing together. This is why the words of the songs that we sing matter, because words have meaning. And we must sing words that proclaim truth, the truth of God's word. This is what we do when we pray together. This is what we do when we get involved with small groups and keep each other accountable. But the author is now highlighting the role of God's word in this, being the foundation that we build our lives on, and what keeps us from believing lies the world is trying to tell us.

Because here's the thing, if you don't know the truth, if you don't know God's word, then it becomes very easy to believe a lie. It becomes really easy to believe what everybody else says if you don't know truth, if you're not building your life on this foundation.

[27 : 40] And many today will say they would like to take Jesus apart from scripture. They may not say it openly like that, but they say it with their lives.

They say it with their lives. This grace part, it sounds great. The fact that Jesus saves, that's amazing. But all of these ideas about marriage and gender, all of this talk about caring for others more than you care for yourself, that stuff changes the way that you live.

That stuff changes everything. Those things can be offensive. But we can't take Christ apart from his word. You don't get to pick and choose.

Al Mohler makes the correct statement when he says, Christ cannot be divorced from scripture. Our knowledge of Jesus as the divine son of God and his accomplishments for us only come through scripture.

We cannot have Jesus apart from the witness of the Bible. The two are inseparably wedded together. In this passage, the author makes a couple powerful statements about God's word.

[28 : 53] First, the word is living and active. Since God is living and is the author of this book, it is alive. Now, this doesn't mean that it changes or it grows up or it changes from season to season, but it means that it is valuable and applicable to us as it ever has been.

It is active. When you look through scripture and God speaks, God also works. And he speaks to us through his word and as he speaks to us through his word, he works in our life.

When God speaks, he works. It's active, it's effective for us. Next, we see that this word is sharper than any two-edged sword. The description of the Bible as a sword shows that it cuts deep.

It has the power to cut deep. When we approach God's word humbly and we try to seek and apply it to our lives, then we not only read the Bible, but it begins to read us as well.

It begins to offer insights about us that we couldn't possibly have imagined. It cuts to the heart. It cuts to our intentions. No other book has the power to do this.

[30 : 09] This reminds me that God's word is dangerous to anyone who is seeking to live for this world. If you're trying to seek to live for this world, then as you read the Bible, it is going to be very dangerous to that way of life because it cuts deep.

If you want to shape your heart to be more like God's heart, then there is no substitution for His word. If you want to shape your heart to be more like God's heart, then there is absolutely no substitution for His word.

And reading through it, it has the power to change our hearts. It has the power to comfort us as nothing else can. It has words of life, words that give our life meaning and purpose, words that are strong enough to build the foundation of our lives on, words that are strong enough to build the foundation of the church on, words that are strong enough to turn this world upside down.

This word has power, it is living, it is active, it is sharper than any two-edged sword. And in the context of this passage, God's words give a strong warning.

What are we to fear? We're to fear unbelief. I'm not asking if you can get every answer right on a test, but I'm asking does your belief in Christ change your life?

[31 : 38] Because following Christ is the witness, it's the proof that you are a follower of Christ. Christ. What are you putting your faith in?

Are you putting your faith in your works? Or are you putting your faith in Christ's finished work on the cross? No matter if you think you are too far gone, if you have breath in your lungs, if you are here today, if you are listening to this message today, then there is hope.

You can give your life to Jesus. And finally, what is the foundation of your life built on? See, God's word is living and active. It's sharper than any two-edged sword.

And this is how God speaks to us and how he shapes us primarily. And so the question is, is he speaking to you this morning? Are you ready to give your life to him?

Are you ready to follow him? To share your faith? To be baptized? To serve on mission for him? Or to do whatever he has called you to do for his honor, and for his glory?

[32 : 45] Because God's word always calls for a response. It's not written to just give you more knowledge, but it's written to change your life. So I want to ask you, is God speaking to you this morning through his word?

And if so, then I want to encourage you to respond. Father, thank you so very much for your word, because it is living and active. Just as you are alive, this word is alive.

Lord, it is as applicable to us today as it has ever been. And it's effective to change our lives. And so, Lord, I pray that we come to your word humbly, asking you to shape us, to mold us, and to make us more like you.

Lord, if we say that we want our heart to be like your heart, then, Lord, give us a desire to read your word, to let it shape us. But also, Lord, I pray for the truth that is declared in that.

Truth that is declared today, that you tell us to be afraid, afraid of unbelief. And so, Lord, I pray that there's someone here today that is putting their hope for eternity in a past action that they didn't know what they were doing, possibly.

[34 : 02] That they were just doing because they saw their friends doing it. Lord, I pray that you help us to see clearly that our faith must be placed in your finished work.

Not in our actions, not in anything that we've done, but in what you have done for us. And, Lord, if we have done that, I thank you for the assurance that you give us that helps us to live boldly for you.

that helps us to live without fear before men because you have accomplished what we couldn't do on our own. And so, God, I thank you for that.

And, Lord, I pray that as we read through your word that we would apply it to our lives, that whatever it is that you're calling us to do, that our answer will be yes.

I want to follow you because you are better. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to invite you to stand.

[35 : 12] We're going to sing a song of invitation this morning. If God is speaking to you, won't you respond as we stand together and sing? Thank you.