Hebrews 4:1-13

Strive to Rest

Sermon final

There is a type of fear that is healthy, and a type of fear that paralyzes. A healthy fear takes precautions, assesses and examines, and stimulates ***movement forward***. An unhealthy fear paralyzes and forces you to move backwards. This passage is calling us to a healthy kind of fear. Look at **v.1** – There is a "**promise of rest"** and we must "**fear"** lest we "**fail to reach it**".

The promise of rest in this passage is our future rest in Heaven – the ultimate place of rest. But we're not there yet, and yet we have precious promises that God will get us there – we need to be very afraid of not trusting them. Look at **v.11 – "let us therefore strive to enter that *rest so that no one may fall*". This passage is a warning against falling from God's ultimate rest in Heaven, and the key to not falling is resting in the promises given to us that are in Jesus.**

Rock climbers have a single objective - make it to the final place of rest on top of the rock. There is a lot of training and sweat and striving to get them there. In order to get to the final destination, they have to rest in their equipment (a harness, sticky shoes, chalk, helmet) and training, lest they fail to reach the top or they fall. There is a condition that every rock climber is aware of, it's called "**climbers freeze**". It's when a climber is on the middle of a rock – maybe they look down, or they get stuck at a tough overhang, or they run out of energy, or they don't trust their equipment - and they are paralyzed with fear. They call it "**getting gripped**". It can be very dangerous because they can get stuck on the side of the rock, or even worse they can fall…either way, unless they push through their fear and rest in their equipment and training they will "**fail to reach"** the final goal.

I wonder if there are some of you who are "frozen" right now…you're facing some difficult overhang in life. ***RIGHT NOW God is calling you to stop, assess the situation in the light of God's truth…and keep on climbing.***

God has given us His promise – I'm bringing you into my eternal rest – but it must be trusted. The writer of Hebrews describes a present rest, and a future rest in heaven. The present rest is a persevering faith in God's ability to get you to the end – to **"Mt. Zion" (12:22),** to the "**city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God**." (**11:10**). At present we are passing through - we are "**strangers and exiles on the earth"** (**11:13**). We are heading up the face of the rock to a better **"homeland"** (**11:14**), a "**better country**" which is "**prepared by God**" as our eternal rest (**11:16**):

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. (Heb. 13:14)

We are climbing to that goal, but it's through the power and promises of Jesus that we will get there safely. These Hebrew Christians have "climbers freeze". They are facing trials and challenges for their faith and they are tempted to "go back down" and the writer is saying, "there is no going back down!". He writes this letter, which is really a sermon, to remind them to "**fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of their faith" (12:1-2).**

Imagine the rock climber who is frozen and their partner climber (it's dangerous climbing alone) carefully slides up and they began to preach truth to them. "Hey, you're ok, you're going to make it. You have everything you need…just sit back in your harness…you feel that? Your harness is strong and secure…just sit there and rest for a moment, catch your breath. Take a drink of your water. Now remember your training…put some fresh chalk on your hands. You are going to make it and the view is great up there and you can rest for as long as you want…but now is the time to climb…LET'S GO."

The Christian life is a climb upward to our heavenly home and we must rest in God's promises to get us there

We're right in the middle of this sermon. In Chapter 4, Jesus is described as our Sabbath rest. Look at **v.9: "so then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God**", and we need to**, v.11, "strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."**

Who is the writer talking about when he says**, "the same sort of disobedience" (v.11).** In chapter 3 he talked about the people of Israel in the wilderness who failed to enter the rest in the land of Canaan that God promised to them. ***We too have a rest in the future, and if we fail to rest and believe in God's promise in the present, we too will fail to enter that rest in the future. Faith is what will get you to the end.***

Look at v.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. (Heb. 4:2)**

Who are "they" and who are the "those who listened"? The story can be found in **Numbers 13-14**. As the story goes, the people made it all the way to the edge of Canaan. They sent out 12 spies into the land, and when the spies came back they gave a mixed report: "Good news! The land is great…but there are giants in the land with massive fortified cities…we can't enter it!" (**Num. 13:27-28**). They received good news, but they heard about the size of their enemy and instead of resting in God's power and promise they were gripped with fear. They looked back to Egypt…and they said, "let's choose different leaders and head back." (**Num. 14:1-**

4). Moses and Aaron fell on their faces (**Num. 14:5**). Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, believed and trusted in God. They tore their clothes and said, "God promised that we can do it and that He will go before us…let's fear God and trust in Him. Don't rebel against Him! Let's enter into the land!" (**Num. 14:6-9**). But instead of being "**united with them in faith**", they sought to stone Joshua and Caleb. **Side note**: don't be surprised when you come alongside someone in the middle of a trial and try to encourage them to press through and they turn and stone you! Fear can be paralyzing and it causes us to do irrational things! As the story goes, they wandered in the wilderness until God raised up a new generation who followed Joshua and Caleb into the land of rest.

The writer is looking back on their example and saying, "the good news of our heavenly home has been preached to us…strive to enter that rest…keep climbing to the end. Jesus will get you there!"

In vv.3-5 the writer reminds us of what God's rest looks like…

1. **God invites us into HIS rest (vv.3-5)**

Notice the focus on GOD'S rest in these verses:

> **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."**

God invites us, in Jesus, into His rest! God is a God who is at rest…He is not frantic, not reacting, not "figuring out what to do". He has a plan and it will always come to pass. He has a plan for you in Christ Jesus and you need to rest in that plan.

The Christian life is a ***climb of rest***…in God.

Rest in His provision of salvation and eternal life. Jesus Christ has climbed the hill on our behalf – He climbed the hill of Calvary and the work on the cross is finished. Our faith is a climb, but it's a climb that all the way rests in the harness of God's provision in Jesus. We rest in the provision He has given and the training He has provided and the power of the Holy Spirit to get us to the top.

We need to be very careful to rest in the provision and promises of God in Jesus lest we face "climbers freeze" and we fall away. Falling away from the faith doesn't happen overnight! We must believe **- V.3 – "for we who have *believed* enter that rest".** For Israel, it was rest in Canaan. For us, it is our eternal rest in Jesus. Don't get caught on the side of the rock! Rest in the provision of God that is in Jesus.

Now verses 6-11 are very challenging so I want to summarize: the writer wants to show that Jesus is better than Joshua and the rest of Canaan. These Jewish Christians are tempted to go back to the law and so the writer takes the entire book/sermon to show that Jesus is better than Moses, better than the law, better than the priesthood…etc. Here Jesus is better than Joshua and our rest is greater than the Canaan rest that Joshua brought the people into.

2. A greater rest than Canaan (vv.6-11)

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.

After the first generation disobeyed and died off in the wilderness, a new generation arose. Led by Joshua, they conquered God's enemies, and they entered into God's land of rest:

> **And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. 45 Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. (Josh. 21:44-45)**

However, the rest of Joshua in Canaan was not the ultimate rest. God is calling believers into a greater rest. **Now the argument of the writer goes like this**: David wrote **Psalm 95** after Joshua, and yet he spoke of a rest and used the word **"today"** to speak of that rest. So there must be a greater rest than the rest of Joshua in Canaan – **v.8 – "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on."** Even though the people of Israel had conquered the land and entered God's rest in Canaan…David speaks of another rest, **v.9, "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God".** David was looking forward to a future rest that remains for God's people. This is the rest that God calls us to and it is a greater rest than Canaan and the one who leads us into this Sabbath rest is greater than Joshua…it's Jesus Christ. **V.11 - "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."** Keep on climbing. Your rest is greater than the rest of Canaan. It's entrance to our heavenly home, our heavenly city – "strive to enter" it.

Now…in light of this exhortation and the failure of Israel in the wilderness…the writer of Hebrews gives a word of warning and word of encouragement…it all depends on the ears and the hearts of those who are listening…

3. Listen carefully to the God who sees all (vv.12-13)

> **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. (Heb. 4:12-13)**

This passage is a favorite verse of so many, and for good reason. For those of you who love this verse I'm hoping you'll love it even more as you see it in its context. It's very easy to miss the forest of v.12 for the trees here by stripping it from its context and by focusing on all of the words used. Notice the word **"for"** at the beginning of **v.12**. This is an argument and its linking **v.12 to vv.1-11**. He gives a lot of descriptors here – **"soul, spirit, joints, marrow, thoughts, intentions, heart"** - I don't think the writer means at all for us to make a huge deal about these words… ***let me just summarize what he's saying with these words so they don't distract you from the big picture, "The Word of God goes down DEEP!" – every descriptor (joints, marrow, heart, etc.) here is DEEP.***

Consider someone who is very sick, and they need to know what's really going on inside so that they can be healed. Consider two different types of scans: a scan by your mother, and a PET scan. A mother scan puts her hand on your forehead, takes your temperature, watches your eating habits, but a mother doesn't really know what's going on deep down inside. A PET scan is where they inject you with a radioactive substance that goes down deep – to the heart, to the joints and marrow – and they put you into a 3D imaging machine and they can get a very accurate picture of what's going on deep down inside of you.

Have you been scanned by the Word of God lately or are you neglecting your regular morning check ups? The Word of God is not like a momma scan…it's like a PET scan. It reveals things that are unseen – which is why he says in **v.13** that God sees ALL **– "all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."** Indeed, **"no creature is hidden from His sight".** The Word of God **"discerns"** what's really going on deep down within you.

That should either encourage you greatly or terrify you or maybe you're just indifferent to it…it depends on whether or not you are a child of God. Your response to God's word – obedience, disobedience, indifference – reveals what kind, what quality of faith you have. The rebellious, sinful, hardened heart that does not want to follow God…hears the Word of God and either flees or it's simply indifferent. The wilderness people fled from God's

promise of rest and they fell away, and they died in the wilderness – they never entered the rest of God. But the child of God hears the Word of God and runs towards God and finds rests in Him and says, "thank you God for exposing what was wrong within me!", or, "I see what you are asking me to do God…I will obey! Help me to believe! Help me to climb! Your Word is SO GOOD!" And you keep climbing to the finish.

Be careful to pay attention and obey when the God who sees all is speaking to you! It doesn't take long to drift away when you aren't paying attention out on Lake Michigan. You look up and suddenly you realize you've drifted from the shore. Drifting doesn't happen in an instant…hardened arteries happens over time and causes massive heart problems.

> **Therefore we must pay much closer attention *to what we have heard*, lest we drift away from it. (Heb. 2:1)**

We are so blessed to have in our hands this amazing tool of God. Every time I read it, it scans my heart and my thoughts…it goes down deep and exposes what's of God and what isn't of God within me. It encourages me, it corrects me, It reveals where I'm doing well, and exposes where there is sickness. It's like the eyes of God scanning deep down within me. But it doesn't just reveal the problems, it also provides the solutions.

So there you are, you're stuck on the side of the rock, frozen, and you're failing to trust in God's promises that will help you make it to the end. And the Word of God comes to you and it exposes your fears and it encourages you to keep going…maybe you read some of the following passages:

Philippians 1:6 - I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:17 - this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Romans 8:18 – For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Philippians 3:13-14 – But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The book of Hebrews is one long sermon written with Word after Word that is intended to keep these Christians from going back. Consider the opening line:

> **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2)**

Jesus is the final revelation of God…He's a better leader than Moses, He's a better priest, He gave a better sacrifice, He brings us to a better covenant - there is no climbing back down…there's nothing there! I love what Peter said when Jesus taught some hard things and many disciples turned away from Jesus. Jesus turned to the 12 and said, "are you going to leave too?" Peter said, "where do I have to go? You alone have the words of eternal life! We believe you are the Holy One of God! There's no going back for me now!" (Jn. 6:68-69)

Don't climb alone. The Christian climb to God's final place of rest is not for "solo climbers". Solo climbers are rock climbers who climb alone. It's much safer to climb a rock using a "belay system" which allows two climbers to climb together and ensure the safety of one another. Hebrews 3:13:

> **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. (Heb. 3:13)**

Sin within you is "deceitful" and your flesh can lie to you…you need to cut those lies with the "two-edged sword"…you need to stick it with the sword of the Spirit. And you need other brothers and sisters who will cheer you on to the finish line. People who will speak truth to you when you're caught on the side of the rock.

> **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb. 10:24-25)**

Church the message to us this morning is simple…keep on climbing, keep on resting in Jesus. He will get you to the end. Whatever you're facing…sit back, open the Word of God…and allow God to pour into you TRUTH that will help you to climb to the finish.

Let's pray.