



Ministry of the Word

*Sunday 06<sup>th</sup> October 2018*

by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Hebrews 4:1-13

**Subject:** Part 9 -

*Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup> For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' "although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; <sup>5</sup> and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest.*

*<sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." Hebrews 4:1 -7*

One of the words that stands out in our text this morning, for most people, is the word 'Rest'. It is the Hebrew word 'Shabath' from the root word 'Shalome' which means peace. Rest means 'the ceasing from work or from any kind of action to relax, sleep, or recover strength. It can also mean to be placed or supported so as to stay in a specified position; it can mean an instance or period of resting or even an interval of silence of a specified duration. Applied

to God's rest, it means ceasing from self-effort as far as salvation is concerned. It means the end of trying to please God by our feeble, fleshly works. God's perfect rest is a rest in free Grace.

**In this life, we can know what it is like to experience God's rest as well as to rest in Him.**

God's rest is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. While resting in Him is when you completely trust in His Word which brings rest for the soul. These types of rest can result in freedom from the effect of whatever worries or disturbs you. Rest does not mean freedom from the situations or even dealing with the worries, but it does mean freedom from condemnation and can allow us to know peace of mind through the valleys of life. We can rest in Him and lean on Him for support. God doesn't always take us out of the situation and sometimes God allows us to go through them but like Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12 verse 8 to 9 –

*And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Also Philippians 4 verses 6 and 7 says –

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup>and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

**To enter God's rest means you need to be reconciled with God.** This results in freedom from guilt, even unnecessary feelings of guilt, all because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, sin is forgiven and we know this because His word affirms it. God's rest is the end of legalistic works. Not only can we know about it but we can also experience peace because of God's Grace. This means we are free to enjoy the perfect, unshakeable confidence of salvation in our Lord. We have no more reason to fear. In God's rest, we are forever established in Christ, He is our anchor and our stabiliser therefore there is no need to run from philosophy to philosophy, or religion to religion, or even life-style to life-style. We can be free from being tossed about by every doctrinal wind, every idea or fad, that blows our way. In Christ, we are established, rooted, grounded, unmoveable. That is the Christian's rest for here and now, in this life.

**As Believers, we will know the fulfilment of His promise of eternal rest with Him forever**

**John 14 verse 3 - *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*** What an incredible promise, an incredible assurance, now wonder we can find perfect rest in Him, what perfect eternal love! The **rest** spoken of in Hebrews 3 and 4 includes all of these meanings. It is full, blessed, sweet, satisfying, peaceful. It is what God offers every person in Christ. It is the **rest** pictured and illustrated in the Canaan rest that Israel never fully understood nor entered into because of unbelief.

**Only God alone has the power to make this provision of complete rest for His people and only His people have the privilege to enter into His promise**, providing that they kept to the conditions of the covenant that God requires of them. The path that led to the land of promise was a narrow way, God's way. Did everyone make it? In spite of all the proofs and evidences they did not because of their unbelief which led to disobedience. Those who are on the true narrow way heading to the promise of eternal rest are very few and far between. The rest He has provided, it remains for some to enter it. He created man for fellowship with Himself, and His plan would not be thwarted, either by a rebellious archangel or by disbelieving mankind. By divine decree, therefore, there has always been a remnant of believers, even among mostly disbelieving Israel. ***"In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice"*** (Romans 11:5). The way of God's rest has always been narrow, and only a few, relative to all of mankind, have ever found it. But some must enter into it, because God's purpose must be fulfilled. By sovereign decree He designed a rest for mankind and some, therefore, are going to enter it.

**No matter how broad people try to make the path**, or fill the narrow way by their own belief system, the biblical fact remains that there is a narrow path and few there be that find it. Like Lot, many of the Israelites, as well as many people today, settled for what they could see with the eye and handle with the hand, what was unseen and not yet realised was of no real importance to them at all. So the Holy Spirit continues to strive with the listener or reader then and now.

The warning sounds out from these verses, to what seems the hard of hearing or those who have chosen not to listen for whatever reason to the gospel. There is no doubt that they

have heard it but to no profit. David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Psalm 95:10-11 cried out the same advice. There is a strong history of the same warning being continual sounded. Consider the millions who would not take it to heart and still do not. The voice of God, then and now, was set to the one side, even ignored.

**The Devil still uses wonders and works** of the flesh to substitute the Word of God and deceive. The social Gospel is found in the illustration of Israel's history. The works righteousness is there, the experiences are there, let's all get along together idea is there, apostasy is there, rebellion is there, but so is the lost. How many times do we have to be warned? Not enough! We need this warning all the time because we can so easily fall, fail and miss the mark. We can make some terrible messes. God keeps continuing to be gracious, checking our hearts, ensuring that we check our own, to make sure we are in the faith, not deceiving ourselves.

**There are many who keep missing the truth and the process they need to undergo altogether even though they sit under the Gospel week after week and so on and so forth.** They may even claim to be years in a church and even add the tag "Christian" to themselves. Try talk to them about the things of God and they are at sea. Hearing the gospel is essential, but it is not enough. The ancient Israelites heard God's good news of rest, but it did them no good since they did not accept it. They did not trust in the God who gave them the good news. It does no good to hear if we do not believe. That is the point here, Hearing the good news of the rest of God is of no benefit, no profit, to any person at any time unless the hearing is united by faith.

**One of the first things that Jesus warned us about in relation to the events leading to His second coming was 'deception' Matthew 24:4.** Many today are being deceived believing that they are right positionally before God and yet they believe in another gospel. Sounds similar, but that's where the deception is played out. Right down these verses, it is not just about people being deceived by others but deceiving themselves. In Matthew 4 The devil offered Jesus the here and now if only Jesus would worship him. He is still at the same trick but says nothing about the hereafter, which of course is Hell. Yet God is more interested in the hereafter, while there may not be advantages in the typical sense here and now, there are many blessings that we can have. But you will notice the sound of warning does not

abate. God knows our hearts so well (v.7) as he warns us, 'Today if you hear His voice' When you stop hearing or listening to the voice of God you are in big trouble.

**As long as your 'Today' remains, there is opportunity to be saved and to enter God's rest.** As long as a person has opportunity to decide, they can decide. A person is never too far gone for God to deal with them. Otherwise appeal for belief would be a mockery. When Israel was in the wilderness, those who refused to believe were not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Yet, God did not forsake Israel as His chosen people. The Jews who refused His Son, who mocked Him and crucified Him, were not allowed to enter God's heavenly rest but God did not forsake Israel even then. Some argue that, because of what the Jews did in the Old Testament in unbelief, and even more importantly because of what they did to Jesus Christ, as a nation and as a distinct people they forfeited every promise of God but we know this is not a biblical point of view. The writer of Hebrews says to them, "a promise remains of entering His rest". God's rest is still available. What marvellous grace!

**Being a true Jew under the Old Covenant was not a matter of having the law but of obeying it.** Being a true Christian under the New Covenant is not a matter of knowing the gospel but of trusting in it and being obedient to our Master. Having a Bible, reading it, knowing it, taking it to church every Sunday, and even teaching from it does not make us Christians. Only trusting in the One to whom it testifies and following Jesus makes us Christians. *"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life,"* Jesus warned, *"and it is these that bear witness of Me"* (John 5:39). The issue is not knowledge or work, but faith. Paul was happy and thankful for the Thessalonians Christians not simply because they accepted the gospel as the Word of God, but because they believed it (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). This signifies whole life commitment to the Lordship of Christ.

**Both the positive and negative sides of this truth are categorical absolutes.** Those who have believed enter that rest and those who do not believe shall not enter God's rest. Belief and unbelief are very serious things. From the human side, belief with nothing else will save us; unbelief with everything else will condemn us. These are the two equally true sides of the gospel, which is good news only for those who accept it with all their hearts.

**God's own rest from His work of creation,** and the rest that He gives us in Christ, are not the rest brought on by weariness or the rest of inactivity, but are the rest of the finished work.

His works were finished from the foundation of the world. God has finished His work. God has done it all, and for anyone who wants to enter into His finished work and to share in His rest, it is available by faith alone.

**Sabbath rest was instituted as a symbol of the true rest to come in Christ.** Which is why Paul could say to the Colossian Church - *"Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ"* (Colossians 2:16-17).

**The second element of rest mentioned here is God's sovereign decree.** It is mentioned second, but it came first. Without God's decree, man's faith would be futile and worthless. We are saved by two things: God's will, expressed in His sending His Son to save men; and our will, expressed in our trust in His Son to save us. We can be saved because He planned to save us before the world was created. That is predestination, or election. Jesus said, *"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him,"* and, *"No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father"* (John 6:44, 65). Personal faith is necessary before God can apply His redemption to us. Yet our personal faith is effective because the Father has first drawn us to the Son. Because God wants us to be saved, we can be saved. Only disobedience keeps us out.

**This bring us to the next three verses in our text**

*For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.* (4:8-10).

What do we see as we go along this statement? The rest spoken of here is not the physical rest of Canaan. That was only a picture. *"For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that."* God's true rest comes not through a Moses or a Joshua or a David. It comes through Jesus Christ.

**God's rest is not essentially physical at all.** Certainly, resting in God and trusting in His promises can relieve us of nervousness, and other physical problems. But these are by-products of His rest. Many cults promise their followers happiness, wealth, and health in this life. The Bible does not. The rest God promises is spiritual, not physical. Whatever physical or

earthly benefits the Lord may give us, His basic promise is to give us spiritual rest, spiritual blessing. Some of God's most faithful believers are the busiest, the hardest working, and sometimes even the most afflicted people imaginable. Yet they are in God's salvation rest.

The term **people of God** may refer generally to anyone who knows God; but here it specifically refers to Israel. Salvation is first of all for Israel. The gospel *"is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Romans 1:16). There is a rest remaining for the people of God, and in the Old Testament Israel is designated as the people of God. His spiritual rest is promised first to Israel, and He will not be through with her until she comes into His rest.

**There is a future aspect to this as well as we see here in the verse.**

*For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. (4:10)*

**God's rest is also future.** In John's vision on Patmos, he heard these beautiful words from heaven: "Write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" 'Yes' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them' " (Revelation 14:13). I believe Hebrews 4:10 anticipates that final day when we cease from all effort and all work and enter into the presence of Jesus Christ. It includes the promised rest to Israel, the ultimate rest when she and all of God's other people will cease from work and rest as God did when He finished His creation. That is the reality of Sabbath rest.

**Now we come to the last part of our chosen text this morning, verses 11 to 13.**

*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (4:11- 13)*

**A person should diligently, with intense purpose and concern,** ensure that they are actually in Christ and in His rest because verse 1 tells that we should fear, lest anyone come short. It is not that we can work our way to salvation, but that we should diligently seeking to enter God's rest by faith—lest we, like the Israelites in the wilderness, lose the opportunity.

**God cannot be trifled with.** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The word 'For', between this verse and what precedes, considers that disobedience mentioned at the conclusion of the previous verse involves disobedience to a 'word' that has been spoken which is the expressed will of the speaker, in this case God. The word of God in particular can never be disobeyed without consequences because it is the word of God.

**Although the title "Word" is applied elsewhere to the Son** (John 1:1), the author of Hebrews, for instance, likens the word of God here to a sharp sword. Christ the incarnate Word is never said to be a sword but to wield a sword –

For Example Joshua 5:13

*“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”*

**Three other examples can be found Revelation 1:16, 2:12 and 19:15,** where a sharp, two-edged sword, symbolizing as here his penetrating word, is said to issue from his mouth. The Word is the expression of God communicated to man, of His will and purposes, as well as the terms of His covenant of grace and the warnings of judgment against unfaithfulness.

**The divine word is, first of all, living and active.** It is no dead letter, no utterance lost as soon as spoken in an un-responding void. God's word, is not a transient word which when uttered is immediately diffused through the air and perishes, but it is a permanent word, not carried off, not dispersed, not diffused, but sustaining and binding together all things. As the word of the living God it cannot fail itself to be living. As God is the God who acts with power, his word cannot fail to be active and powerful. Its effectiveness derives from its source, which is God himself, and from its purpose, which is the will of God; and neither God nor his will is ever subject to frustration and defeat. The essential character of the word of God in its

inexhaustible vitality and dynamic efficacy, is clearly defined in Isaiah 55:11, where God says through his prophet:

*"so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."*

**The vigour and the potency of His word** are seen in its operation as his creating word (Genesis 1:3 and Hebrews 11:3), his sustaining word (Hebrews 1:3), and his regenerating word (2 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Peter 1:23).

**God's word is described, further, as sharper than any two-edged sword.** This means that as the instrument of God's mighty acts it is more powerful and penetrating than the keenest instrument devised by man. Paul similarly calls the word of God the sword of the Spirit in Ephesians 6:17 when he is addressing spiritual battle, again placing it in a category distinct from and far above any mere human weapon. As God's sword it is double edged: it never fails to cut; there is no blunt side to it. The twofold function of God's word in speaking of temporal as well as of eternal things.

**Human explanations are far from satisfactory.** If special significance was to be assigned to the details of symbolical language, as in the verse, it would be preferable to establish that the word of God, like a sword with two sharp edges, cutting effectively with both sides, that is to say, either in a saving or judging manner, seen both in the Old and New Testament.

Thus, on one hand, Christ proclaimed,

*"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."* (John 6:63)

And, on the other hand, he says of him who rejects him,

*"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48).

**The piercing character of the word of God** is such that it penetrates to innermost depth of man's being, causing the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is hardly necessary to inquire whether this means separation of soul from spirit and of joints from marrow, in other words, God has the power to separate spiritual from natural material. God's word reaches to the innermost depth of man's personality. The Reformist John Calvin once said,

*"There is nothing so hard or firm in a man, nothing so deeply hidden that the efficacy of the word does not penetrate through to it."*

Nothing can be hidden from God, nothing.

**When we read verses like these**, we can quickly glide over them and if not, we can sometimes think, I'm a believer so this does not apply to me! Does it? But just think, to whom is God's word primarily written to? It's not the world, but to us, the believers. God's people are encouraged time and again, warned time and time again through the word and the reason for this is because we are in a battle. The accounts recorded serve as illustrations for us to emulate or avoid at all cost. God is the only one that shows us the price tag in relation to our disobediences.

**It may be narrow, but God's way is secure, and it leads to life.** Many who have found the way are saved not just from the penalty of sin but from the pain and price that life without God costs, on so many different levels. Are we sure we are in the way as these verse cry out to us? How can we be sure? We can be sure by true repentance and taking heed to His Word. God's grace includes His forgiveness, His love, His mercy, His patience, and His justices. It is all of these and more besides, combined, pressed down and overflowing to those who are His in spite of what He knows about our hearts. We ought to go home rejoicing in the knowledge we are His and if you are not, than today is today to hear His voice and not turn away.

*Amen.*