

Hebrews 4

Hebrews 4
Tape #8209
Pastor Chuck Smith

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Hebrews, chapter four. In the third chapter, and I'm so convinced that Paul is the author of Hebrews, that I'm going to attribute it to him, whether he is or not. It is so typical Pauline in the writing and in the style, that I think that just about every commentary I've ever read does acknowledge that Paul is, no doubt, the author of the Book of Hebrews. I try to say, well the author of the Book, but I think that it's pretty obviously Paul. So if I slip up and say, Paul said. Then you'll understand that that's because I believe that Paul was the author, but in reality, the Holy Spirit is obviously the author of the Book, but the Holy Spirit uses human instruments and in this case, I believe it was Paul.

But in the third chapter, he introduces the subject of the rest that God has for His people. And bringing up the rest that God has for His people, there is first of all that rest in the work of the Holy Spirit and that life of victory that we can experience victory and power over sin through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

And in that he uses the example of the children of Israel, who failed to enter into the rest of the Promised Land. They spent their lives roaming in the wilderness. They never did obtain the full promises of God, the glorious land that God desired that they should enjoy.

And thus, that is used as an example for us that because of their unbelief they weren't able to obtain all that God had for them and all that God wanted for them. And the warning is to us that there are promises of God that people have not laid hold of! Unbelief can keep us also from the full blessings of God, that land of promise, that land of blessing.

So as he starts chapter four, it is actually a carry on from chapter three. We can just read the latter part of chapter three and you can see how it brings us into chapter four.

Wherefore (as the Holy Spirit saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in *their* heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved for forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Unbelief keeps you from all that God has and desires for you. It is unbelief that keeps you back. Now, the unbelief so often stems from our looking at ourselves and seeing our failures, our shortcomings, our weaknesses. Because somehow we cannot divorce our minds from the reward of the good, positive enforcement. You reward the child for good behavior. And the child is punished for bad behavior. And somehow we cannot divorce our minds from this concept. We have a tendency to carry it over unto God. And we think of God rewarding our good behavior. And when we are conscious of our bad behavior, there is no expectation or anticipation of God blessing us.

In fact, we say, well, I know that God can't bless me because I failed in this or I did that or I yelled at the kids or I, you know, got angry at that fellow who cut me off on the freeway. So I know that God can't bless me. And with that attitude, I don't have faith to receive the blessings of God; hence I don't enter in to all that God has for me.

And so that's basically the warning here. God has much more for us, but He doesn't give it to us as a reward for our good behavior, **He gives it to us because He just loves us!** And you know to accept grace, gracefully, is a very difficult lesson to learn.

When God begins to bless me, though I realize I don't deserve it, I then try to promise God. Well, Lord, I'm going to do better and I will deserve it! I mean I'll prove that You did a good thing in blessing me like that and I'll be better! And yet, I can't just get my mind free, totally, from the idea that the reward for good behavior, rather **than God just loving me and by His grace, wanting to bless me, if I'll just simply trust Him and believe Him to do it.**

So, they did not enter in because of unbelief! That's what kept them out. They did not believe that God would do the things that He promised to do; and hence, they failed to enter into that rest.

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. There are certain things that we should fear. God has given us exceedingly rich and precious promises. He has pretty much covered all of the bases. There is not a need that you have but what God has not made provision for it, and has given you promises to take care of it. But let us fear lest God has given to us a promise, that we should come short of receiving it. That we not obtain that promise because of unbelief in our hearts.

²*For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them:* In other words, the gospel was preached across the board. It was preached to us as well as to them who did not receive it.

but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. So the gospel was preached to all. To those who believed, it was profitable. To those who don't believe, it was not profitable, because it wasn't mixed with faith. It wasn't received by faith.

All of the blessings of God that are bestowed on me, are bestowed by the grace of God. And my simple believing and trusting God to do it, though I am painfully conscious of my failures, my weaknesses, but I am trusting God to do what He said He would do, not as a reward, but just as a token of His love and His grace for me.

There was a long period in my Christian life when I was seeking to be blessed of God, predicated upon my good works. I used to fast, expecting God to bless me because I've fasted now and I've spent time in fasting and prayer, going away and getting alone with God in the mountains or in the deserts and just spending time fasting and praying. I was doing it with the anticipation and the thought, surely God will bless me because, look, what I am doing! I am fasting and praying.

When I was pastoring in Tucson, my second pastorate. I was just a very young minister at that time. I would go out into the desert and I would fast. And I would come in for the Wednesday night service. And I would think, oh boy, the Lord is really going to bless this service tonight because I've been fasting! God, You've just really got to bless tonight because I've out there in the desert, fasting and praying, and living with the Gila Monsters, you know. So surely, Lord, You've got to bless tonight. But because of the fasting, I would be physically weak. I would have to hold on to the pulpit. And my mind wouldn't function well. And the service would just be a dud! And I'd think, God, that's not fair, I've been fasting. You know, surely, Lord, You've should have blessed because I was fasting! And I learned by the hard processes, over many years.

I didn't learn it in Tucson, but over many years in the ministry, I came to understand the grace of God and the blessings of God, bestowed upon me because of His grace. Not because of my works, not because of my goodness, but because of His love and His grace. Once, having discovered that,

I've never been short of blessings. Because I just believed God to bless me, even though I know I don't deserve it. But it's not a reward for my good efforts or my works. It's just something that He does, because He loves you so very, very much! And thus to accept grace, gracefully, is a great lesson that I had to learn. We all need to learn that lesson.

There were those the gospel was preached to them. The opportunity to experience God's forgiveness, God's love, God's grace, was offered but it didn't profit them because they didn't accept it by faith.

³*For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.* Now he has used the children of Israel and their failure to enter into the Promised Land as an example, their unbelief that kept them from the promises of God.

But now, he is going to talk about a different type of rest. The rest of the Sabbath, the Sabbath Day rest. And so he is going to use now the illustration of God having created the earth in the six days and resting on the Sabbath or on the seventh day.

⁴*For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, (and this is how He spoke) And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.* Now, it wasn't that God was tired. It was the rest of completion. There was nothing left to do! The whole universe was created. All of the life forms, there was nothing more to create! And so God rested from His creative acts, not that He was worn out and tired and had expended so much energy in creating the whole universe, that He just had to sit down and say, whooo, you know, and recover. But it was the rest of completion. It's completed. So it's a finished work. It's a rest.

It is interesting that in each of the days of creation, you read, and it was evening and it was morning, day one. And it was evening and it was morning, day two. And through the six days of creation, but when you get to the seventh day, it doesn't say anything about it coming to an end! It doesn't say it was evening and it was morning, day seven! It doesn't say any of that, and thus the rabbis say it's because God is still resting. It's finished. The work of creation is finished. And so He rested in the finished work of creation.

Now when Jesus came, He said He did not come to do His own will but the will of the Father and to finish His work. There was, God had finished the work of creation. But when man sinned, then it was necessary that God do a work of redemption for lost man. And so Jesus came to finish the work of redemption, that is by offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sin, taking upon Himself our guilt and our sins, and offering Himself as a sacrifice. And on the cross, Jesus cried, **"It is finished!"** He is talking now about the work of redemption, God's work of redemption, it was finished on the cross. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. There is no work that I can do, by which to save myself from sin. The work of redemption is a finished work! Jesus finished it on the cross!

So He spoke in a certain place, concerning this seventh day, God rested the seventh day from all His works.

⁵*And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.* ⁶*Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:* Now Paul talks about how that the Jews never attained to the righteousness of the law because they sought by their works to attain that righteousness, but the Gentiles have attained unto the righteousness of the law, because they believed in God. And thus the person who is trying to work and by good works, to please God or to appease God, never makes it!

Jesus said to His disciples, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven. That should close the door once and for all of our endeavor by our works to hope to please God and appease God for our sins. If the Scribes and the Pharisees couldn't make it by works, there is no way you'll ever make it by your good works. They were filled with good works. And yet they failed. Why? Because of unbelief. The message of grace was preached to them. But they were bound up in their works. And so it remains that some did enter into the rest, the ones to whom it was first preached, they didn't enter in because of unbelief.

⁷*Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, That is after so long a time! I mean it was in the wilderness that God said, Today, if you harden not your hearts, but they provoked God. Now years later, when David comes upon the scene, there still is a failure to enter in to that rest.*

Today, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Here's the promises of God, still not fulfilled. They have not yet obtained all that God would have for them. There is so much more for each of us that God desires to do, that God desires to give and we fall short because of our failure in faith!

⁸*For if Jesus* (Now, Jesus, is not the Jesus of Nazareth. This is Joshua. He is still talking about the children of Israel. He is talking about their coming into the land.) *had given them rest,* If he had brought them into that place.

then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. It is interesting, Moses could not bring them into the Promised Land. The law cannot bring you in to the promised walk in the Spirit. Moses couldn't bring them in.

Joshua led them in, but even with Joshua, it was not a complete subduing of the land. It was not a complete possessing of all that God had promised. There was much of the territory still in the hands of the enemy, when Joshua died. It was not a complete victory. They did not take all that God had promised to them, all that was available, all that God would have done.

And I think that so often we also fall short. We may enter in and begin to experience the life of the Spirit and the victory of God's Spirit working in us. But there is so much more that we could enjoy and have, if we would only press on by faith and take that which God has and desires for us.

Dwight Moody was challenged by the statement, the world has yet to see what God could do, if He had just one man who was fully dedicated to Him. There is so much more for each of you. There are so many promises that we've not claimed.

⁹*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.* It's still there! It's still possible to enter into it.

¹⁰*For he that is entered into his rest, God rested. And we enter into His rest.*

he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. On the Sabbath Day, God had finished His work and He rested. It's over! It's done!

Now, we also can enter into that rest of the finished work of Jesus Christ! It's a done deal! I cease from my works and I rest in the finished work of Jesus! Now, the glorious thing is that that is where God is resting. He is resting in the finished work of the cross! We need to rest in the finished work of the cross and to realize that God has accounted righteousness unto me by my simple faith and trust in Jesus! It's not by my good works, not by works of my righteousness, for by grace you are saved through faith, that not of yourself, it's a gift from God!

So, ¹¹*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest,* That sounds a little funny, doesn't it? Let's labor to enter into the rest.

lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. As the children of Israel fell in the wilderness, let's be careful. Let's seek to enter in and to experience that beautiful rest in the finished work of Jesus.

¹²*For the word of God* (And now he switches gears.) *is quick (alive), and powerful,* God's promises. They bring life. They are powerful. The power of the Scriptures! The power to transform our lives! The power of the Scriptures to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. The life giving power of the Scriptures!

and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, And we talked about this today. How that the soul and the spirit are so integrated, that it is almost impossible for us to recognize whether or not it is a soulish experience or a spiritual experience. And there are many people who are having soulish, emotional experiences, that they interpret as spiritual experiences. Experiences that they believe are experiencing the power and the dynamics of the Holy Spirit, which only has touched their emotions or their soul, their psyche, and have never penetrated into the Spirit realm.

There are a lot of people today that are going around looking for emotional experiences. And they come away from these emotional experiences, deceived, because they think they have had a genuine Spiritual experience.

I've heard people say, oh, it was such a glorious service. The power of the Holy Spirit came down. People were just so moved by the Holy Spirit. Just waves of the Spirit moving over the people's lives. In fact they didn't even get a chance to preach. But what does that tell you? It was all in the realm of the emotion. It's the Word of God that feeds the Spirit. You see you cannot grow Spiritually on emotional experiences. And as great as the emotional experience might be, you don't grow Spiritually on emotional experiences. **You can only grow Spiritually on the Word of God. It is the Word of God that feeds the Spirit of man. And your Spiritual growth comes through the Word, not through experience.**

And so the Word of God is able to pierce, dividing asunder between the soul and the spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart. God's Word, discerning the thoughts and the intents of the heart, the motives behind the action.

And really, one day when we stand before the Lord to be judged as the believers, coming to the Bema seat of Christ, to receive the rewards, our works will be judged by fire. And many of the works that a person has done will be as wood, hay and stubble. And will be consumed by the fiery judgment. Those that survive, we will be rewarded for. But, the works will be judged, it says, of what sort they are. Not so much what I did, but why I did it.

Paul said, though I sell all that I have and give the money to the poor, if it wasn't motivated by love, it profits me nothing! Great works, marvelous generosity, but what was the real motive? Was it to be seen of men? Was it to receive praises of men? Was it to get the, Ooooooh, isn't he glorious?

Jesus said, be careful, be careful, that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of men. Be careful that that is not your motive, to be seen of men. Because, he said, if that is so, you have received your reward.

And then He talked about how we were to give. Not to let the right hand to know what the left hand is giving, actually. Not to make a big display over our giving.

Our prayers, they are not to be as a public display so that everybody says, oh, isn't he a mighty man of prayer?

I was conducting a summer camp in Williams, Arizona. We had a pastor in the camp, that every morning about five o'clock, would be down there in the sanctuary or in the auditorium, praying loud enough so that everybody in camp could hear him. He would wake us up in the morning. Everybody said, oh my, isn't he spiritual? He's down there every morning, praying, you know. It was so loud, everybody knew it! And when he would walk around camp, everybody would say, ooh, you know, a spiritual man!

Well, Jesus said, when you pray, go in your closet and shut the door! Pray to your Father that sees in secret. And your Father that sees in secret, will reward you only. I sometimes wonder, when you are praying that loud, if somehow maybe we are not even aware, maybe there is a hint and we are ignoring it, but somehow, there is something in the back of your mind that says, they are going to all know how spiritual I am, as they will hear me praying here every morning, you know. Drawing attention to yourself.

There is practice that has sort of developed in some churches of when singing worship choruses, people will stand up individually around the church. I find that very distracting. I guess I am so carnal that I notice them. And I'm distracted. And I wonder, why are they standing up, when everybody is sitting down? Are they trying to say that they are more spiritual than the rest of us? It would seem that if I would do things that would distract a person, you see, when I am looking at them standing there and I am wondering why are they standing? I'm not really thinking of the words of the chorus. I sort of have lost contact with the worship, you know, singing the chorus. I'm now thinking of them standing and wondering what they are thinking and why they are doing it?

Take heed that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of men. Be careful that that isn't the motive. Because those things that are done with that motivation, will not survive the fiery judgment. They will be burned. The Bible says many people will be saved as by fire. In other words, there won't be much there, when your works are put to the fiery test. There won't be much left, but you'll still be saved, thank God, His grace and all. But it's something that we need to give attention to.

And the Word of God, it can discern the thoughts and the intents of our hearts. That's why David said, search me oh God, and know my heart! Test me, Lord, and see if there is some way of wickedness in me. Because David knew that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? But God said, I search the heart. I try the reins.

¹³*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: God knows all about you. You don't hide anything at all from God.*

but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. There are no secret things. There are no secret motives. Nothing that God doesn't see. There is nothing that God doesn't know. You are an open book. You don't hide anything. I think that sometimes because we are clever and we can hide our true motives from men, somehow, we get deceived and think that we are hiding them from God. How ridiculous!

Now he jumps again in thoughts. He goes now to the thought of Jesus as our great High Priest. And surely at this point, we need one! You see, we are standing before a God that knows everything. He knows the thoughts and the intents of our heart. Everything is naked and open before Him with whom we have to do. And recognizing that, I need someone to stand for me before God. I need an intercessor.

¹⁴*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* ¹⁵*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (weaknesses); but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Jesus went through greater temptations than you have ever experienced.* None of you have come close to facing the same intensity of temptation that Jesus faced. You see, all of us fell, faltered, long before we came to that intensity of temptation that He had. Satan tempts us. When you resist, he continues, looking harder and harder for the breaking point.

With Jesus, there was none! And thus He was tempted in a way such as we would know temptation. But in being tempted, He came to an understanding of what it is, so that He could have mercy in understanding you, in what you are going through.

So our great High Priest, He knows what it is, to be under the pressure of temptation. And in all points He was tempted as we are, yet without sin, that is apart from sin.

So He can be touched. And oh, I thank God for this! He is touched by my weakness!

He said to Peter, oh, Peter, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. And He's touched by my weakness. He understands it.

I love that Scripture (Psalm 103:14) that says, God knows our frame, that we're but dust! You know, sometimes we think we are super-saints or something. God says, no, you're dust! He knows your frame. You are made up of dust. And knowing our frame, there is that compassion. There is that mercy. And there is that grace that is available for us.

And so because we have this great High Priest, you see, again the contrast and in the next chapter, it's going to continue in the idea of Jesus, our great High Priest. That is introduced here in chapter four. It's going to be carried, in fact, not only in chapter five, but really throughout most of the rest of the Book of Hebrews. He's going to be coming back to Jesus as our great High Priest.

Again, the whole background to the Book. There were Jews, who had received Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sin through His death on the cross, His sacrifice. They had come to accept Jesus as their Savior and accepted His sacrifice for their sins. But as they were bound up in the traditions of Judaism, the holidays, the feast days, the taking of the sacrifices to the temple. There were some of them that were drifting sort of back into Judaism.

That's why you have in chapter two, therefore, let's take the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest we should drift away from them. For if the word spoken by the angels was steadfast and every transgression received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect this great salvation?

There was that danger of drifting back into Judaism. Because there was a certain security, realizing that on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest goes into the holy of holies, there before God to offer the sacrifice for the sins of the nation. There was that very moving ceremony as the goat was led out to the wilderness and departed and went out into the wilderness. And the idea of our sins now being washed, being separated, gone. And that great Day of Atonement, where the one goat, offered as a sin offering and the other fleeing out into the wilderness. And the idea, my sins have been forgiven, but they've also been lost! They have been separated from me. This was moving. It was a touching thing.

Tradition, it's like Christmas. It's like Easter. It's hard to give up because it's so engrained in us traditionally. There are the aspects of the family and the different aspects that just seem to hold us to the tradition.

And coming to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. There was sort of a feeling that we don't have a High Priest anymore. He would go into the holy of holies. I knew that I would not dare to go into the holy of holies. I wouldn't enter into the presence of God! I knew that if a person would try to enter into the holy of holies, they would be smitten dead! To dare to presume to come into the presence of God, would be instant death! Sinful man standing before a holy God! So the priest, after many sacrifices for himself and all, on this one day, would go in before the people. But even then he would go in with bells on the hem of his garment, in case there was something wrong with the sacrifice, he'd be dead! If the bells stopped ringing they had a rope around his leg and they would pull him out! And so I was thankful that someone was going in for me!

But there is sort of that insecurity now. So Paul is saying, look, we do have a great High Priest. He understands you. He understands the weaknesses. He understands the temptations.

¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, And we can now come boldly, ourselves, to the throne of grace. We can enter into God's presence, through our Great High Priest, through Jesus.

He has made access unto the Father for each of us, to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Jesus Christ, my Lord, has opened up the way, the way to heaven's gate! When He died on the cross, to redeem all the lost, He prepared a road that leads to His abode. It's a road marked by blood, that it leads us home to God--the glorious access. As Paul, writing to the Ephesians of the many blessings that we have in Christ in heavenly places, **by whom we have access through His blood. Access to the throne of grace, where we can come boldly because of the finished work of Jesus!**

Father, we thank You for all that You have provided for us through grace. And help us Lord, that having received the promises of entering into the rest, that we would not stay in the wilderness, that we would not find ourselves struggling in an endeavor to somehow appease You. But Lord, help us to rest where You rest, in Jesus Christ, in His finished work on the cross for us. May we enter in, Lord, to that rest. In Jesus' name. Amen.