

Hebrews Chapter 4 - John Karmelich

1. What does the gospel message and God's rest have in common? Yes, that's a strange way to start a lesson and yes, that question is my lesson title. Then tell me why should I care about this? The book of Hebrews says that God's rest and the gospel were preached to the Israelites over 1,000 years before Jesus came on the scene. If those Israelites heard the gospel message, and somehow involves God's rest, what does that mean? For starters, it isn't just about physically resting on the 7th day, which is one of the Ten Commandments. Hebrews Chapter 4 teaches us that trusting in Jesus (which in effect is the Gospel message) also involves God's rest. Let me explain further:
 - a) In effect, this is about learning to trust God to guide every aspect of our lives. This does not mean we have to think about Him every moment of the day, but just to trust Him to guide our lives. That is the type of rest that God desires, and is different from a "seventh day rest" which again, is one of the Ten Commandments.
 - b) Know that living the Christian life was never meant to rely upon our willpower. To put it another way, God does not want us to struggle through life, but to draw upon His power in order to live our lives. How we actually do that, is the main topic of this chapter.
 - c) Back in Chapter 1, I stated that the book of Hebrews is in effect a commentary on a single Old Testament verse: "The righteous shall live by his (or her) faith". (Habakkuk 2:4b.) The focus of the book of Hebrews is to teach us what to "live by faith" means. It is more than believing God exists and even more than believing Jesus has paid the complete price of our sins. As important as those issues are, that is not "God's rest". His rest is the belief that He desires to guide our lives. It is the belief that we can draw upon His power in order to make a difference in the world around us.
 - i) So does that mean I could just pray for things, and never have make any effort to work in life? Hardly. We still have to make the effort to accomplish things, but the source of our strength is not within us, but within Him.
 - ii) Think of God as the engine that provides for us the power to accomplish anything that makes a difference for Him in this world. How we access that "engine" is the main topic of this lesson.
2. With that little speech out of my system, let me share something about my own life. Before I was saved, I used to think at times that I didn't accomplish much in life. There was a movie character I used to relate to: That character was "Salieri" from the 1984 movie "Amadeus". That movie was about the famous musical genius named Mozart and a rival of his named Salieri.
 - a) The plot of the movie was that Salieri wanted to make great music like Mozart but didn't have the talent to do so. By the end of the movie Salieri called himself the patron saint of the mediocre, because he felt like someone that didn't accomplish anything great in life.
 - b) Since God lead me in this ministry, I no longer relate to Salieri. God now uses me in a way to make a difference for Him. I am not saying I am now or will be as famous as Mozart. I am saying that one can be used by God to make a difference for Him, if we learn to rely upon His power to make that difference.
 - c) This does get me back to the subject of trusting in God's rest. The idea is that to be used greatly by God is not about how many people we influence. It is about our willingness to trust Him to lead and guide our lives. It is about relying upon His power and His strength in order to make that difference in the world around us.
3. OK John, other than the fact you no longer feel mediocre, ☺ what am I to get out of this lesson?
 - a) The idea that God wants to use each and every one of us to make a difference for Him. The peace of God is to realize that it is His power that guides our lives and not whatever talents and abilities we have. Yes hard work is still involved, but the power source of our work is in Him. That is what we are going to go through in this chapter. With that said, let us now look at Verse 1 of this chapter and discuss our "power source" some more.

4. Hebrews Chapter 4, Verse 1: Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.
- a) The first phrase in this verse focuses on a promise to enter God's rest. Before I talk about what that verse means, notice that the writer says in effect, it is not too late for them or us to actually enter that rest. The writer to the book of Hebrews is saying that as long as we are still living this life it is never too late to enter God's rest.
 - b) Now that we know we can still "do it", what is it, we should do? How do we actually enter that rest as described here in Verse 1? Know that the issue has nothing to do with trying versus not trying. The issue is about trust. It is about trust that God is guiding our lives. It is about trust that no matter how good or how bad things may appear at any given moment, God is in charge and He will work out our lives for His glory.
 - c) OK, if God is doing that, what do I do? Do I just stand here and watch? Of course not. We still have to go through our lives and make the best decisions possible. We still have to work hard at our jobs, our school or whatever it is we believe we are called to do.
 - i) The secret to life is to take aspects of our lives and say to God, "OK You (God), are in charge of these aspects of my life. If I am doing what You want me to do here, bless it and guide me. If there is something different You want me to do, make it obvious what it is You want me to do and guide me down that path."
 - ii) It is amazing how many people I meet in my life who turn away from what they enjoy doing or what they believe they are called do to in exchange for earning more money or say, trying to become famous. They think that unless they are only taking the highest paying job they can get, they will be happy in life. What they discover over time is that they end being miserable because they can't stand doing what they are doing. Yes there are times when one has to do to support one's self or one's family. I'm just saying that one should pray to God to lead us where He wants us and over time, that will happen.
 - d) Just when I thought I was getting off track of this verse, I read the second part of it and realized that I already addressed it. In other words, the second half of this verse is saying we will miss out being blessed by God if we fail to live by faith. That faith is not just that He exists, but that it is His desire to guide our lives for His glory.
 - i) Also know where God guides us is not always a pleasant experience. Sometimes He does allow us to go through "hell" to lead us where He wants to take us in life. The hard part is learning to rely upon His timing through those difficult times.
 - ii) With that happy thought stated, I will move on to Verse 2.
5. Verse 2: For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.
- a) Here is something interesting to consider: The text is saying in effect, "The Gospel was preached to them." The "them" were the Israelites who came out of Egypt. As I stated in my introduction, If Jesus didn't come on the scene until over a thousand years after that time frame, how was the Gospel preached to them? (Then tell me why I should care. ☺)
 - i) The idea was not that they understood the full aspect of Jesus dying for their sins. God was trying to explain to them about trusting in Him, even in the most difficult situations. The "Gospel" is more than believing one is saved. The Gospel message also includes the idea of trusting that He is going to guide our lives through the good times and bad times. It is that He will lead us to victory in situations that seem impossible without Him.
 - ii) This leads to you and me. Even as devout Christians, we can see situations in our own lives where we may think, "There is no way I can get out of this situation without dying or really suffering badly." The faith God wants is to trust Him through those situations that seem impossible to work out without His help.

- b) OK John, what if try to do what I believe God is calling me to do, and in effect I still fail miserably? The short answer is God is often trying to teach us things by our failings.
 - i) Let me use politics as an example. There are a lot of political candidates who believe God is calling them to run for a certain office. That does not necessarily mean they are going to win. It means that God wants to teach them things by them running for those offices in the first place.
 - ii) My point is what God calls us to do and immediate victory do not always go together hand and in hand. What He calls us to do is often difficult and even painful at times. The point is about trusting Him to get us through the best and worst of times and trusting that He is guiding our lives through such times.
 - c) One more question: What does any of this have to do with Jesus? Let's face it, one can believe in any god and trust that their god is guiding them. Why should I believe that Jesus died for my sins as opposed to trusting any religion that says, "Just trust?"
 - i) The answer is evidence. Look at the evidence that Jesus really died and rose again. There is more evidence for Jesus' death and resurrection than any fact in human history. There were lots of witnesses to that event who refused to deny that truth even to the point of being tortured to death. If you think that God is always going to give us a pleasant life in this lifetime, think of how those apostles died.
 - ii) What about people that have a good life but don't trust in God? The answer is to remember that this life is the only joy they may have unless they are willing to change their ways. God never promises all will be well in this life. He promises great rewards in heaven to those who are willing to trust in Him.
 - iii) Living for God is about His desires happening in our lives. Sometimes they will be pleasant and sometimes they will be hard. The idea of "rest in God" is about trusting that His plan for us is still far greater than any and all rewards we can earn in this lifetime if we ignore His will for our lives.
6. Verse 3: Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world.
- a) For those who have read my first three lessons in Hebrews, you won't be shocked that the writer of this letter quotes the psalms at this point. This verse is a quote from Psalm 95, at least the part in "quotes" within this verse.
 - b) The writer of Hebrews is making a comparison of "entering God's rest" (that is, trusting in Him to guide our lives) with the fact that He "rested" on the seventh day. The main point being that "God's rest" is a different concept from a 7th day rest. Let me explain:
 - i) In Genesis Chapter 1, it states that God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. Personally I hold the view that if "God is God", He could have created the world in six seconds or any other time frame He desired. God wanted to teach us something about the concept of working six days and resting on the seventh day by describing creation within that specific time frame.
 - ii) The idea of God resting is usually associated with His "creation". He rested in the sense that the world He created was created at the end of that specific time frame.
 - iii) So does that mean God "kicked back on the couch and watched television on the seventh day?" Hardly. Think of it this way: God is still working today changing people's hearts to trust in Him. Therefore, we know at the least by the fact that you and I are saved that God is still working if He is done making things.
 - iv) So if God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, how do we actually enter His rest? The idea is about trusting Him. God rests in that His plan for us has been set in motion and from His perspective that plan is a "done deal".
 - v) To say it another way, if God is perfect, then He cannot learn anything. Therefore God rests in that He knows all things that will happen in the future.

- c) Well John, that may be all good and fine that God knows all things including knowing all things about the future, but we don't. How do we deal with life if we don't know what is going to happen to us today or tomorrow? That is what His "rest" is about: Trusting Him.
- i) If God knows what is going to happen in our future we too can join His "rest" in the sense that since we know He knows all things, and since we trust that He cares for our lives, we then trust His guidance. It is about trusting that our situations will work out for His glory, no matter what we may think might happen.
 - ii) Does that mean things will always work out for our comfort? Again, the original disciples were tortured and killed for their faith. We don't rest in the sense that all things turn out "peachy" in this lifetime for us. We rest in that the price for our sins has already been paid. We rest in that if we believe God is guiding our lives, He is working it out for His glory, no matter what happens to us.
 - iii) But John, I hate pain. Welcome to the club. ☺ Shouldn't I do all I can to avoid pain and hardships in my life? Of course. We have to remember that if God knows all things and in effect He is "resting" in the sense that He knows all things will work out according to His plan, we can rest too knowing that He will guide us through whatever pain we have to face in this lifetime.
 - iv) As I write this, I have a devout Christian friend who is about to go into surgery. My favorite definition of minor surgery is, "surgery on someone else". When it is surgery on us, it is major surgery no matter what is the procedure. My friend does not fear death, but he fears the pain that comes with that surgery. Therefore I pray for God to give him the strength and courage to deal with that surgery.
 - a) The point of that story is that God promises to guide us through our good and bad moments in life. He never promises us a pain free life. We can have rest even during the most stressful times of our life knowing that if God knows all things and He is "resting", then we can also have faith that He is going to work out our lives for His glory even through our pain.
 - b) Meanwhile, we only got through Verse 3 of this chapter.
7. Verse 4: For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."
- a) In these verses the writer of Hebrews is still making His point that God "rested" from all his work on the seventh day. So why is the writer making such a big deal about "seventh day rest"? Does this mean I'm not supposed to work on Saturdays when Jewish people go to synagogue? That interpretation would be taking these verses out of context. If we should stay home on a specific day of the week, what about those who are policeman or doctors, who have to work on that same specific day of the week? My point is the issue of resting on Saturday's is not the topic of these verses.
 - b) What amazes me is the idea that God Himself laid out the arguments of working six days and resting on one day "for our sake". In other words, God created the idea of the six-day workweek and stopping to rest on a seventh day. That doesn't match any lunar or solar calendar schedule. There is no evidence in the sky as to when the 7th day occurs.
 - i) My question of the moment is why did God lay it out this way? Why not a 10-day week or a three day week? Why did He decide to create the world in six days and rest on the 7th and what do we learn from that? Part of the answer is that God wants us to take time off every now and then (He choose the length of working six days and resting a seventh day) so that we can appreciate all He does for our lives.
 - ii) Think of it this way: The fact that God calls us to work six days means that He considers work (or school for some of my readers) important. In effect He does not say to all believers to ignore our lives and spend all day in church. He expects us to support each other and ourselves as much as possible.

- c) With that little speech out of my system, the focus of these verses is not on the six days of working, but on the seventh day of "rest". God laid it out that way and created the world that way as a pattern for us to follow.
- i) Ok John, I know this. Why is it emphasized here? The answer is to get us to understand what His rest is all about. It is not about ignoring our responsibilities on the seventh day. If you study Jesus' life, He did most of His miracles on the seventh day (on the Sabbath) in effect to show that God works on the Sabbath.
 - ii) So if God is capable of working on our lives any day of the week, what is the purpose of the seventh day of rest? Shouldn't that be a day we go to church? Remember that the purpose of going to church is not just to hear a sermon or go through specific rituals, but to get together with other believers to strengthen our selves and others so we can face the world we have to deal with. That strength that comes from gathering with other believers is how we rest on the seventh day.
 - iii) With my respect to "Seventh Day Adventists", my personal view is I don't care if one gets together with Christians on Sundays or on other days of the week. I believe the important point is we "rest" by gathering together with other believers.
 - iv) Let me explain it this way: It never ceases to amaze me how much it energizes me even when I am tired to do something good for someone else. When I take the time and trouble to write these studies, I don't do it for the money, and it benefits my life in ways that is hard to describe. In short, it gives me "rest".
 - v) The concept of God's rest is not just plopping down on a bed and taking a nap. The concept of rest involves doing things to help other believers and gathering with other believers in order to benefit each other's lives. That is the type of rest that benefits our lives and the type that God desires for us.
- d) OK, John, that is all well and good. What does it have to do with Hebrews Chapter 4?
- i) The underlying point is about trusting in God to guide our lives and learning to live to make a difference for Him. That is how we rest in Him. I think of it as using my time "resting" by trusting that He is guiding my life. Yes I still have to make the effort to do what I believe He is calling me to do. Yes I still have to go forward in life and make the best decisions possible. Yes I still have to actually write these studies. The point is in effect I rely on His strength to do what He has called me to do. Therefore, I can rest while I am doing all of these things knowing that He is guiding my life for His glory.
 - ii) But what if life is really difficult at the moment. What if I am in a lot of pain now? How do I rest if all of that is occurring? The answer comes back to the question of, "Is God in charge of my life or not? Do I trust that Jesus is guiding me through this situation or not? If He is, why am I worried? We still have to make the best decisions possible, but the results are His problem, not ours.
 - a) By the way, if one is in pain, I am not saying we should ignore getting any medical help. My point is about trusting that God has a reason to allow us to go through this "mess" and trust that He is still guiding us.
- e) Verse 5 says, "They shall never enter my rest". Is there a point when it is too late? Sure there is. It is called death. Many people, including Christians, go through their whole lives worrying about specific problems and refuse to believe that God can and would guide them through whatever issues they are dealing with. In effect, such people refuse to "let go and rest" in trusting that God desires to guide our lives.
- i) So does God harden their hearts or do such people just do it themselves? My view on that is that God gives us what we want. In effect He says to us, "You want to ignore Me? Fine. Here are the consequences." It then becomes harder to turn back because we have made the life choice to not trust Him to guide certain aspects of our lives. That is the "not enter my rest" danger that any of us can face.

8. Verse 6: It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.
- a) At this point it is important to come back to the topic of understanding the difference between a Sabbath (7th day) rest and "God's rest". The idea of stopping one day a week from what one normally does (i.e., the 10th commandment) is a good thing. It literally refreshes us to rest from normal activities. That is why God designed the seven-day concept of working six days and taking some time off on one day from normal activities.
 - b) With that comment out of my system, the "rest" being described here is different. The rest being described here comes back to the idea of not trusting God to guide one's life.
 - i) Note that Verse 6 states that the Gospel message was preached to the Israelites who came out of Egypt. That idea was also hinted at back in Verse 2.
 - ii) I used to think that the Gospel message was just about believing Jesus died for our sins and trusting in that fact He gives us eternal life. I'm now learning based on Hebrews Chapter 4 that it is more than that. It is about trusting that God desires to guide our lives for His glory. That is how this generation of Israelites failed to believe the Gospel message. That is how most people fail in their relationship with God: It is not that people ignore the concept of Jesus dying for them. What they ignore is trusting Him to guide their lives.
 - iii) My main point of this discussion is to understand that taking time off to physically rest and "resting in God" are two separate, but important concepts. The idea of resting in God is about trusting that He is guiding our lives.
 - c) OK John, you've been beating this theme on us for the last lesson and a half. ☺ Tell me exactly how do I trust in God? What is my "marching orders" for my life?
 - i) The answer believe it or not comes back to a commitment to read and trust His word. It comes back to a commitment for daily prayer to ask Him to guide our lives. It is about asking God in effect, "I am your servant. What do You want me to do today?" I find the answers to those prayers are amazing.
 - ii) Does that mean God is obligated to verbally answer me when I pray that way? Of course not. God works on His timing and not ours. I have discovered that His will for us becomes obvious over time if we do make the commitment to seek Him through prayer, through time in His word and time with other believers.
 - iii) The way I describe it is, "This seems like the logical thing to do at the moment". That is often the way God answers our prayers. We see a need in front of us that has to be done and we take care of that need. We make the best decisions we can with the time given to us in life. We use the most valuable commodity we have, our time, for His glory. Of course we have to balance our needs of doing what we have to do to survive with the need of helping others.
 - iv) In summary, my point is if we seek God first, then things just work themselves out in terms how the rest of our day happens. Does this mean I can't plan? Of course not. It just means we lay out our plans and desires before Him and say, if this is what you desire, bless it. If not, block these plans and make it obvious to me what it is You want of me. I have found that God makes His plans obvious to us over time. Usually we just have to go forward and trust that He is guiding us. Other times, we have to plan and go forward with our plans.
 - v) Let me summarize this verse by stating that the way we rest in God, by trusting that He is in fact guiding us and we are willing to be lead as He guides us.
 - d) But John, those Israelites were given blatant marching orders to go conquer the area of land that we call "Israel". I've never had God give me any specific orders that blatantly. How do we know what to do? The answer gets back to seeking Him through time in the bible and time in prayer. When one is willing to submit to Him, I find it becomes obvious over time as to what God wants us to do.

9. Verse 7: Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."
⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.
- a) The writer of Hebrews is still trying to convince the original Jewish readers of this letter that there is a difference between the Sabbath (7th day) rest and God's rest. The way the writer makes that argument is he goes back to Psalm 95. King David wrote this psalm. That is why Verse 7 says that David wrote, "Today if you hear his voice".
 - b) To explain this, I need to talk a little about the concept of the Promised Land. That land does refer to the land of Israel. God promised to give them that land when He spoke to Abraham many centuries before it was ever conquered. The Israelites who came out of Egypt from the Exodus were too afraid to go conquer it.
 - i) The next generation after that original generation that came out of Egypt did trust God and did conquer over the residents of that land. Joshua was their leader.
 - ii) The writer of Hebrew's point is in effect is that David lived many centuries after Joshua. Here is David in Psalm 95 saying in effect if just living in the Promised Land is "it" for God's rest, why would David speak of "another day" of rest?
 - iii) To put it another way, just living in Israel was not God's idea of rest. If the Promised Land alone represents' God's rest, why did the Israelites have to do so much fighting not only when they got there, but to remain there? To this day and for many millenniums, the land of Israel has been a hot bed over who should live there and who that land really belong too. Without getting into politics here, my point is simply that the land of Israel does not represent God's rest. If you want proof of that, simply read just about any news story about the land of Israel today. My point here is the history of Israel, it predominantly, not one of peace.
 - iv) So if the Promised Land is not symbolic of "God's rest", what is? It is that daily trust in God that I have been speaking about throughout this lesson.
 - a) To say it another way, what the Promised Land was symbolic of, is that daily trust in God the Father and in God the Son in order to guide our lives to do His will. Just living in that land (Israel) does not bring one peace as history has proven. Living with the daily trust in God to guide our lives is the type of mental peace that He desires for all of us.
 - c) OK John, I sort of get all of that by now. Tell me why my life as a Christian is so difficult if God is giving me "rest" at this time? He never promises that life will be easy. What He does promise is that He will "bear the load" for us. Translation: It is His desire to get His will done through our lives. Usually that requires hard work on our part. The point is through our journey in life, God can and does use our lives to get His will done if we are willing to submit to Him. His rest does not mean we take it easy all the time. The rest means we don't have to worry about the results of our lives. Our job is to live to make a difference for Him. The results are up to Him, on His timing.
 - i) This seems impossible to do. How do I trust in a God who I can't see and doesn't speak to me verbally? That is why He gave us a bible to study and that is why He wants us to pray. That is why He wants us to trust in Jesus as our "High Priest". That is our representative before God the Father who understands all that we go through in our lives. My point is once we make the commitment to live that type of lifestyle, one finds it becomes impossible to want to live any other way.
 - ii) A bible teacher named Jon Curson compares this lifestyle to learning to ride a bicycle. When one first learns to ride a bike it is hard and one falls down a lot. However, once one gets the hang of it, it becomes easy. One actually relaxes as one is peddling on the bicycle. That is a good description of trusting in God's rest as we live to make a difference for Him. It is hard at first until we get the hang of it. After than, we learn to trust Him to lead us and that in effect is God's rest.

- d) Let me make one more quick comment about these verses before I move on. The verse warns us not to harden our hearts. How do we do that? That is usually when we are too afraid to do what we believe God calls us to do. What one has to remember is that if God calls us to do something, He will also provide us with the ability and the means to do it.
- i) I'll use these bible studies as an example. Sometimes I don't feel qualified to write these studies because I was not classically trained and I never went to seminary or a bible college. That is when God reminds me, "If I called you to do something, don't you think I will also provide you with that ability to accomplish that goal?"
 - ii) It never ceases to amaze me how week after week, month after month all of these studies get written. I have also learned that I trust in "His rest" in order to get these studies out and not my own ability to accomplish them.
 - iii) Do I still have to physically write them? Of course. Did God give me the gift of being a fast typist? Of course. Did God make it possible for me to have lots of time to prepare for these studies? That is pretty impressive for a God who I have never seen nor ever heard audibly. My point is if God can and was willing to do this through my life, He is more than willing to work through yours as well.
 - iv) This leads me back to "hardening our hearts". We can always choose to disobey what God has called to do. We can always think that we are not qualified to do a particular task or we don't have the skills or we don't have the time. Those are examples of how we can choose to harden our heart to what God wants us to do.
 - v) As I have been taught, God is not looking for ability, but availability. From that point God is more than willing to work with us to make a difference for Him.
 - vi) With that said, we are ready to move on to Verse 9.
10. Verse 9: There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.
- a) The writer is continuing to make his point that the "Sabbath rest" is more than just taking off a day of the week from one's normal activities. It is about trusting in God to guide our lives. So why is the writer of Hebrews making such a big deal about this?
 - i) For the religious Jewish person, the idea of the 7th day of rest was "it". They believed they had to work hard six days of the week, and then spend a 7th day going to synagogue and spending that day focusing on God. The false concept is in effect if we make some effort to trusting in God to guide our lives, one is saved. That is about trying to prove one's worthiness to God by one's efforts.
 - ii) An important to state here is that such efforts are not bad things. God would not have made the Sabbath one of the commandments if it were a bad thing. My religious Jewish friends are very nice people who lead very productive lives.
 - iii) The issue is not happiness. The issue is about not having to try to prove to God how good one is. We trust in Jesus as complete payment to our entrance to heaven as opposed to going through rituals to try to prove our value to God.
 - b) OK John, I sort of get all of this. I as a Christian understand that I don't have to work to get into heaven and I understand that I need to trust God to guide my life. You can stop beating this over our head at this point. ☺ This leads me to Verse 11. The verse is telling us (all of us) to make every effort to enter that rest. What does that mean?
 - i) It means to consider areas of our lives where we may be doing things that are not God's will for our lives. It means if there is something we are struggling with in our lives, we say in effect, "Dear God, I can't deal with this right now. It is Your problem. I'll just make the best decisions possible and whatever is the results of this situation, I will accept it." That is resting in God. It is not about life being easy and is not about taking time off to relax. It is about trusting God with everything.
 - ii) With that said, I believe we are ready to move on to the next verse.

11. Verse 12: For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
- a) Remember that when Hebrews was first written it was probably not considered part of God's word. That makes me wonder what the author meant by the expression "Word of God?" Was it just the Old Testament? Did it include the gospel accounts or any of Paul's other writings? I don't have the answer to that question.
 - i) What I do believe I know is why the topic of the bible is brought up here. The point is it is His word that teaches us how to have His peace.
 - b) Remember again that the original audience of the Book of Hebrews was those from Jewish backgrounds who converted to Christianity. If you asked them what was "God's word", I would suspect at that point in time, it referred to what we call the Old Testament.
 - i) That leads to the main point of these verses. The issue of the moment is still about understanding God's rest. The point is the Old Testament has the ability to teach us what God's rest is all about in terms of our daily trust in Him.
 - ii) In other words, you don't have to take my word for it that God wants to guide our lives daily. We can read any part of the bible, including the Old Testament and be convicted by what His word teaches us.
 - iii) Therefore, the "Word of God" can refer to just the Old Testament, or even include the book of Hebrews as it has been publicly accepted to be part of our bible.
 - c) Before I go any further, it is important to remember how we know the entire bible is the Word of God. First of all, we know it is God's Word through predictions. Roughly a third of the bible is predictions about the future. If we have "history written in advance" we can know that somebody outside of time as we know it wrote this book.
 - i) The next way we can know this is the word of God is by archeology. Know that archeologists have verified much of what historically the bible claims to be true. The third and final way we can know this is God's word, is simply by how much we can be convicted by what it teaches us. Believe it or not, that conviction point is a main point of these verses and leads me directly to my next point.
 - d) These verses are effectively saying that the Word of God can convict us to the point where it can separate our soul and spirit. Let me explain that one.
 - i) Our soul is the part of us that will live forever. I like to use the comparison of computer hardware and software. The words we write on a computer screen have no weight. Our computers don't weigh any more when we add software or even write and record things like what I am writing right now. Like the software on a computer, the "real us", (that is our soul), has no weight. That is how we can exist forever. When we go to heaven, we will be given new physical bodies that don't wear out and somehow work for the atmosphere that exists in heaven.
 - ii) Now that we are more confused about our future bodies in heaven, let me quickly talk about the Spirit of God. As Christians, God takes up residence inside of us. If you have any doubts about this, consider how guilty one feels if one knows what is the right thing to do, but we don't do that right thing anyway.
 - iii) That guilt in effect, is what these verses are talking about when it says the word of God has the ability to separate the "soul and the spirit". It is a colorful way of saying the Word of God can make us feel guilty about not doing the right thing in life. It mentally separates our soul and God's desire by reminding us of what to do in any particular situation.
 - e) The next reference of Verse 12 mentions "joints and marrow". That reference is saying just as a doctor can make a cut between our muscles and our joints, so God's word has the ability to convict us of what is the right and wrong thing to do at any moment in time.

- f) Let's say we accept all of that as being true. Now what? That leads us back to the issue of trusting God daily to guide our lives. So how does He actually guide us?
 - i) That is why the writer of Hebrews focuses on the issue of God's word here. It is through His word that He guides our lives daily. It is through His word that we can learn what is the right and wrong thing to do in any situation.
 - ii) Just as a doctor's knife can carefully cut into us, so the word of God can carefully teach us what is His will for any moment in time. Does that mean I randomly open to a passage and it answers my questions? Of course not. We have to read it steadily and thoughtfully and it will convict us by what it teaches.
 - g) One more time, let's assume we all accept that is true? Then what?
 - i) The point is the necessity of regular time actually reading the bible. My own style of reading the bible is using three bookmarks: I keep one in the Old Testament, one for Psalms and Proverbs and one for the New Testament. Every day I move my bookmarks. You don't have to use that particular reading style, but it is mine.
 - ii) OK John, if I do read my bible daily, why do I still desire to do the wrong thing? In other words, why do we still sin even if we know what is the right thing to do?
 - a) If there were a magic pill to make every bad desire go away, it would have been invented a long time ago. In order to live the type of life that God desires of us, it is necessary to not only spend in His word, but regular time in prayer as well as times with other believers to keep accountable.
 - b) My point is we can have victory over sin, not by "trying harder", but by trusting God to give us that victory over sin. That is one of the main points of "resting in Jesus" that the author is getting at.
 - h) The simple point of this verse is about the reminder that if we believe God is perfect, then we also believe He knows all things. If we are accountable to Him, and we believe He is in charge of our lives, then we need to trust Him to guide our lives the way He wants us to live. That the "rest" that these chapters are emphasizing here.
 - i) The main point to remember about Verse 13 is that we are accountable to God. If one has any doubts about that, think how guilty we feel when we does the wrong thing. If we are accountable to Him, the secret of life is to trust in His power to live the way He wants us to live. That is again what "His rest" is all about.
12. Verse 14: Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.
- a) In Verse 14, we are back to the topic of Jesus, the High Priest. The main point here is the reason we can give our problems to God and talk to Him about areas of our lives where we are struggling is because Jesus is our High Priest.
 - b) Let me put it another way: If Jesus never came into the world to die for our sins, how would we ever know that He cares about our lives or can relate to our problems?
 - i) Let us says we only had the Old Testament form of worship. We may even offer some sort of sacrifice to God out of gratitude that He exists or we may even regularly confess our sins as is common in other religions.
 - ii) However, we would never know for sure that God is aware of our confessions and our sacrifices unless we knew there was a human who can relate to what we went through. That is why there is the necessity of Jesus as our "High Priest".
 - iii) OK lets assume for the moment we accept that as true. How do I accept the fact that He hears millions or billions of prayers at the same time and can relate to what I am personally going through in my life? This gets back to the idea of how big is the God we believe in? If we believe in a single God that is big enough to create the world, as we know it, then we should believe in a single God that is big enough to listen to all of our prayer requests. If that doesn't work, consider all the evidence of how God has been working in our lives.

- c) The next thing Verse 14 talks about is the fact that Jesus has "past through the heavens".
 - i) That calls for a technical explanation. In the bible, the "first heaven" is considered our atmosphere. Think of the first heaven as the place where birds fly and where airplanes travel. The second heaven represents outer space. The third heaven represents wherever God's throne is located.
 - ii) But John, I believe God is everywhere. If He is everywhere, how can there be a specific place where He and Jesus are located? If people are resurrected, we must need a physical place where we go when we are resurrected. That is the physical place where heaven is located and where Jesus is physically located.
 - iii) OK John, that is neat. Why should I care? So we know that Jesus is actually at the physical place where He can intercede between God the Father and ourselves.
 - iv) In other words, a reason we have faith in Jesus is not only that we accept the fact He has paid the full price for our sins, but we accept by faith He is at God the Father's right hand and He can relate to what we deal with in life.
 - d) Let me explain this as an illustration. Let's say we know we are guilty of some particular sin and we are on trial for that sin. Think of God the Father as the judge in that trial. The evidence is shown that we are guilty of that sin. That is when Jesus, who is our defense attorney says in effect, "Yes he or she is guilty, but I agree to take the penalty for them."
 - i) That same "defense attorney" (Jesus) is one we can talk to about whatever issues or problems we are struggling with at the moment. Our attorney is in effect saying to us, trust Me, and I will guide you (that's us) through those issues. That is the type of trust that God wants us to have to trust Him to guide our lives.
 - ii) It may help to quickly remember the basic difference between a prophet and a priest. A prophet in the bible is someone who delivers a message from God to us. A priest is someone who helps us draw closer to God. A priest is someone who helps us in our life to relate to God. Jesus is our priest before God the Father.
 - iii) If we can turn to Jesus as our priest, why the need for other human priests? The writer of the book of Hebrews will focus on that issue in Chapter 5. For now, just know that the purpose of human priests on earth is to help us understand exactly what God the Father expects of us, and what Jesus can do for us.
13. Verse 15: For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.
- a) The writer of Hebrews is reminding us here that Jesus, as our high priest can sympathize with our weakness toward sin. How do I know God can understand exactly what it is that I am going through right now? Yes I believe Jesus is God, but Jesus was here 2,000 years ago. How can I know for sure He can relate to my life and my issues?
 - i) First of all, Verse 15 says, "He can". There is an element of faith involved in that we have to trust that Jesus can relate to all the issues of our lives.
 - ii) Let me answer this by evidence. If you have been a Christian for a good while, think how much one's life has improved since one first made that commitment.
 - iii) When I started this lesson, I talked about before I was a believer I related a lot to a character Salieri from the movie "Amadeus". That character near the end of his life believed he didn't accomplish very much and he called himself "The patron saint of the mediocre". After living many years now for Jesus, I have watched God work in my life in amazing ways and I realize I have been used by Him to make a difference in lives of others. I realize I no longer relate to that movie character.
 - iv) OK John, good for you. I don't feel that way. What about those who are martyrs for Jesus? How do they or me, make that difference? As to martyrs, they inspired others to make a difference for Jesus. My point is when you make a difference in the lives of others, then one is never ever wasting one's life for Jesus, period. The evidence is learned from making an effort for Him and watching the results occur.

- b) All of this leads me back to the verse. The idea is we believe that Jesus was tempted by sin, but He never actually sinned. We accept the idea that we can trust Him to guide our lives. We accept by faith that we can trust Him to overcome that temptation to sin if we give those issues over to Him to change us on His timing. We also accept by faith and evidence He is more than willing to use us to make that difference in the world. Jesus can use our lives so that we do feel like we are significant and make a difference for others.
 - c) But what about people who don't trust in Jesus but are already significant? How do you explain those who are significant but never put their lives in God's hand? Good question. For starters, God uses people for His glory even if such people don't believe in Him.
 - i) As a biblical example, think of the "Pharaoh" the Exodus story. God raised up that man to be the leader of the greatest empire the world has known at that time.
 - a) Was that man significant? Yes he was.
 - b) Was his life significant in that world? Yes it was.
 - c) Was that man saved? No.
 - ii) Just because someone is significant, does not mean they are saved or living their life for His glory. There are many people who use their fame and power for their own glory or for other purposes. My point here is that someone can be famous but still not trust in God's rest in order to make a difference for Him. The point is someone may be significant, but they are still guilty before God for their sins.
14. Verse 16: Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
- a) This is the final verse of this chapter. The point here is that since we do have Jesus who is our high priest between God the Father and ourselves, we can approach God the Father with confidence (no fear of punishment) that He can help us in our time of need.
 - i) Let me expand on the word "confidence". We can trust that we can approach God, despite the sins we commit and the flaws of our lives. We can boldly come to God to help our lives as the complete price for our sins has been paid.
 - ii) Yes we should still confess our sins when we become aware of them, as one of the purposes of the Christian life is to regularly realize, "His desires for our life are right and what we did was wrong." It is that realization and turning from that realization is what confession of sin is all about.
 - b) What we have here is the end of a two-chapter discussion of how we have "God's peace" in our lives. The writer makes the point that God's peace is different than the Jewish "Sabbath" (day of rest) concept of resting on the seventh day of the week. It is by trusting God to guide our lives we can live with the type of joy that He desires for us.
 - i) The chapter ends with the reminder we can boldly approach God because we have a priest (Jesus) who can relate to our lives because we know He was human. We can approach God with confidence (boldness) knowing we are forgiven, knowing that He understands how we struggle through our lives and knowing that He still wants us to have an intimate relationship with us despite our shortcomings.
 - ii) To put it another way, God knows we have problems. He still wants us to bring those issues to Him as opposed to trying to avoid Him. He wants us to come to Him boldly knowing that all of our sins, even our current and future ones are already forgiven. That is the type of peace that God desires for our lives daily.

With that said, I can now close this lesson in a short prayer:
15. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the peace that we can have in our lives all the time. We thank You that You are always willing to guide our lives despite of our sins and shortcomings. Help us to never be ashamed to come to You boldly with whatever issues we face at any moment in our lives. Help us to use our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. Guide us to do Your will in our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.