

Hebrews 3:1-4:1

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[0 : 00] Money and success won't make you happy or content.! I was rich. I had everything.

I guess it's like the old songs about movie and pop stars who want to commit suicide. They have everything and yet they are so unhappy. It is true. I had nothing on the inside.

We could quote film star after music icon after business tycoon and they would have a similar tale. All the money, no peace.

All the success, no contentment, no satisfaction. Mick Jagger was right all those years ago. Mick Jagger was also right that we try and we try and we try to find it in all the same places.

We still believe that money and success are the answer. Because we believe that we are the exception to the rule. You see, money and success won't make you happy and content.

[1 : 23] It's advice that we hear all the time but we think that we would actually be okay with it. If we were trusted with it, if we had money, if we had success, we wouldn't fall for those old trip wires that everyone else tripped over.

All the testimonies are the same. They don't work. You get money, they solve one problem, they create another. You get success, it solves one problem, it creates many others.

We think though that we're the exception. If we just had those things, we'd be content. We'd be happy. We would have that inner peace that we're all striving for. And so we just follow the same path.

It is, when you think about it, the definition of madness. And part of the reason it is just so crazy, so crazy to live that way, so crazy to continue down the same path that everybody says don't make you happy, don't deliver contentment.

And the people that have got the things that we think if we had them, they'd make us content, they say it doesn't make you content. The reason why it is so crazy to live this way is that actually satisfaction and contentment and peace and joy are actually available.

[2 : 41] You see, the longings that we have for these things aren't some cruel trick that our hearts play on us. Those desires and longings that are there exist because in God's design, there is actually a way that they can be met.

And that is in relationship with Him. You see, we were made for God. And it's true. All of us know this. The Christian life is beset in the present by frustration and struggle.

Yes. However, many of us, most of us, if we're absolutely honest with ourselves, we know that those who follow Christ can and do know contentment of some degree and joy of some degree in our lives.

But more than that, we know that those things in their fullness, contentment and joy and peace, those things in their fullest sense are our future.

That's what the writer to the Hebrews is describing when he talks about rest in our passage this evening. Quoting Psalm 95, talking about God's people in an earlier generation, he says, chapter 3, verse 11, As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

[4 : 00] He talks again in 4, verse 3. Can you see? The good news came to, for he who has believed, for we who have believed, enter that rest. As he has said, as I swore in my wrath, they shall never enter my rest.

The rest that the they that he's talking about failed to receive was the peace and prosperity of Canaan, the promised land. But the writer to the Hebrews is applying this to his first century hearers and the future that they look forward to.

He is holding out to them, entering his rest. His rest is the state that God is in eternally. You see, before God created the world, he was at rest.

That's how he describes his perfect communion of love and joy as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He entered time to create our world, his work of creation.

And when he had completed that work, he rested. So one commentator says this, quote, The goal of human existence, here it is, here's why we all exist. The goal of human existence is a share in God's own glory.

[5 : 09] It is stated explicitly in chapter 2, verse 10, that God is leading, do you remember last week, many sons to glory. And this must mean a share in God's own way of existing, a participation in God's own presence and power.

This rest is therefore to live as God lives, end quote. Life in the presence of the supremely wonderful, supremely joyful, supremely content God.

That's actually what we talk about when we talk about eternal life. You know, when we talk to people about, put your faith in Jesus Christ and you'll receive eternal life. That can sound a bit like you'll receive existence for a very long time.

Now, eternity is a very long time. But that is what we're talking about when we talk about the life of eternity. When we come to Christ, this is what we receive. This is what we look forward to.

Life in the presence of the supremely wonderful, joyful, content God. And the perfect fullness of this, and the full experience of this, is what we look forward to as God's children, as we were described last week as brothers of Jesus.

[6 : 28] Now, for most of us, that future day is a long way off. At least we hope it's a long way off. And this text reminds us that if we're going to partake of this rest, we need to persevere to the end.

Chapter 3, verse 6. Can you see? And we are Christ's house, that is, we belong to Him, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Look down 3, verse 14.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. He's saying you've got to keep going. If you want this rest, you've got to keep going.

But the truth is, like these first hearers, we're beset by temptation. Temptation from within, temptation from without.

And the thought of struggling on for 2 or 3 or 4 or hopefully 5 or 6 more decades, well, it feels like an impossible task.

[7 : 23] Yes, we want the contentment. We want the joy. But how do we get there? That's the question that we're dealing with this evening.

The contentment, the joy, the rest, sharing in the presence and the power of God. That is what is held out to us. That's what we're looking forward to. How do we get there?

Well, Hebrews 3 and 4 tell us. The answer runs right through these chapters, and it's this. We get there by faithfulness. We get there by choosing faith and choosing obedience to Christ and by rejecting the alternative, which is unbelief.

To make this point, Hebrews has us learn the lesson of history, the history of God's people. And the author says first, If we're going to get there, first of all, we must hold fast to the faithful son.

We must hold fast to the faithful son. That's chapter 3, verses 1 to 6. 3, verse 1. Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him, who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.

[8 : 38] For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. As those who are in Christ's family, we are called to consider or to contemplate Jesus.

And to do so because he is both, do you see, our apostle and our high priest. Now, that's an interesting phrase because it's the only place in the Bible where Christ is called an apostle.

The word we heard this morning means sent one. So an apostle is sent, and he is sent with the authority and the commission of the one who does the sending.

So Christ's apostle, apostles, the 12, they were sent out by him and they had his authority. That's what we saw in Acts 9 this morning. Here, though, Christ is the apostle.

So what's going on there? Well, it is he has been sent by God the Father and represents God to us. At the same time, he's also called our high priest.

[9 : 42] That is, as one of us, he is to represent us to God. The priests were chosen from among the people and stood before the people to represent them to God.

So for Christ to be our apostle and high priest means that he represents God perfectly to us and us perfectly to God. So when it comes to thinking about your standing before God, in Christ you have one who has been faithful to his calling and he has done all that you need.

Boys and girls, how much is left for you to pay? Zero. Zero. He has done all that you need. And that, I want to say, just to be clear, that is where our journey to glory, to rest, must start.

If you want to know God, if you want to be in relationship to the God of all the earth, you need to put your faith in Jesus. One of the most compelling invitations that Jesus makes during his earthly ministry is when he calls people who were stubbornly rejecting him in Matthew chapter 11.

And he says this, very familiar to many of us. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. That's the offer.

[11:01] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Rest for your soul.

No religious system. No secular vision of life. No spiritual practice can give you this deep, enduring soul rest. But because he is a faithful apostle and high priest, Jesus restores us to the relationship where this rest is available.

That's why, in the context of chapter 3, he is greater than Moses. Remember, Moses is the great hero of those who want to go back to the old shadows of old covenant Judaism.

The author uses the image of a house. 3 verse 4, Remember at the start of this series, I talked about this lesser to the greater argument, that you see again and again and again in the book of Hebrews.

Here it is again. So he's not saying, Moses was bad, Jesus is good, old covenant bad, new covenant good. Both are described, you see here, as faithful. Moses was faithful in all God's house.

[12:26] Christ is faithful over God's house. Both are faithful. But Moses was a servant in God's house. Therefore, how much more greater, and worthy of glory is Christ as a son.

Moses was faithful as a servant. His ministry pointed forward to Christ. Christ is greater than Moses because he brings a better, fuller salvation. We see this in that Christ is both the builder of God's house and Lord over the house.

And the house that he's talking about here, the house that he built, was composed of people. Do you remember in 1 Peter chapter 2, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. He's talking to a congregation of the people of God and he's saying, you're a spiritual house. You're building blocks that have been built together into God's house. When it comes to the Christian house, there are three classes of people.

Some are never in the house. They have no interest in the house. They don't go to the house. They don't knock the door or nothing. They're never in the house. Others look like they're in the house for a while.

[13:46] They behave like they belong for a time, but then they walk away. Then there are those who truly belong, the elect of God. And they are those, verse 6 of chapter 3, who remain holding fast their confidence to the end.

See what he's saying? Jesus is greater than Moses, so hold fast to the faithful son. So you go from here. I say to you, hold fast to the faithful son.

You say, great, I'm going to hold fast to the faithful son. What does that look like? Thanks for asking. Point number two, here's what we do. Cultivate a faithful heart. If the first point is, he says, hold fast to the faithful son.

The second point, how do we do that? We cultivate a faithful heart. And there are two key aspects of what this means. The first is this. Heed God's word today.

Heed God's word today. You can't miss the refrain from Psalm 95 running all the way through. Chapter 3, verse 7. Chapter 3, verse 15.

[15:00] Chapter 4, verse 6. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion. The word today, here, is used most often in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, where the people are told of the demands of the covenant on them today.

Deuteronomy 4, particularly, repeated there. Here, the book of Hebrews, God is speaking by his son. Remember, chapter 1, verse 1. And again, chapter 3, verse 7, by his spirit, through the scriptures.

And because God is outside of time, his word is always today. And the emphasis here on listening, hearing, and responding in faith is to us in the moment.

You see, this is not what the people in the wilderness did. Look at verse 8. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years.

Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said, they always go astray in their heart. They have not known my ways. I said at the beginning, the author here is taking us on a history lesson, as it were, from the people of God under the old covenant.

[16:20] And he's saying, when the people of old rebelled against God, they were faithless in three ways. He outlines it there. Verse 8, they hardened their hearts. In the Bible, the heart is the seat of both knowledge and choice.

And to speak of it being hardened in this way is to describe a conscious choice to refuse to hear and to refuse to obey God's word. That's what it means. A hard heart, that's how a hard heart is expressed, to refuse to hear and obey God.

Secondly, their hearts went astray. Verse 10, this has the sense of allowing their hearts to wander morally, to be led off after sin and foolishness.

Their decision was, actually over here looks better, I'm going to go in this direction. I'm going to believe the promises of the culture over here and I'm going to go in that direction. Their hearts went astray and then thirdly, they saw, verse 10, three verse 10, and they saw God's ways and ignored them.

See, he says there, they have not known my ways. Their not knowing there isn't about ignorance, isn't about knowledge. They saw what God did among his people.

[17:33] They knew that he had given them his law for how they should live to please him. It's about rebellious disobedience. It's about saying, I know what God says and I'm going to do something else.

And that's what the people did. God was speaking today, in the moment, in the present, and that was how the people responded. They were faithless rather than faithful.

And that is why he was angry with that generation. That is why he refused to bring them into his rest. That is why they did not get to the rest that lay ahead of them. And our author applies the same warning to the Hebrews as he does to us today.

3 verse 12. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving, that is, faithless heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. He's saying, watch out.

[18:39] If you refuse the word of God, if you don't receive it with faith, if you consistently choose folly, making bad choices that lead you away from God, and if knowing how God's word calls you to live, you choose another route, you're in danger of falling away from Christ.

Watch out. So, we need to take an honest heart check, don't we? If you play around with sin, you cannot expect to persevere to glory.

You will fall away. You will forfeit your rest, just like 3, 16 to 18, those in the Old Testament. Their example is very sobering. Look at verse 16. For those, for who were those who heard and yet rebelled?

Was it not all those who left Egypt, led by Moses? Who was it that rebelled? Some who'd experienced the glories of the Exodus.

They'd seen firsthand the miraculous rescue through the Red Sea. God had done great things in their time. But they hardened their hearts and wandered away and so fell in the desert. You hear people say from time to time, if God just turned up and showed himself in a miraculous way in my life, well then, I would absolutely follow him no matter what.

[20:01] That's what I want. If he did that, then I'd be able to believe and I wouldn't be so faithless or I wouldn't struggle in the way that I do. Well, that's not true. That's not true because those who left Egypt, led by Moses, did the same.

Imagine talking to one of them. Say to them, were you actually there? Did you see the sea part? Oh yeah, I walked through the Red Sea.

Dry land. We got to the other side, we all sang hymns. Thinking back actually, it was quite a thing now that you mention it. Well, that's quite a story to tell.

Do they get you up at church to share that and talk about what it was like? Well, I don't really go to church anymore, to be honest. It was a bit tough in those early days in the wilderness. We had some struggles as a family and to be honest, I found the preaching after a while didn't really connect with me. Plus, we were trying to make things work and I needed to provide and I was working very hard.

[21 : 10] I needed to be on the road a fair bit. looking back now, it was quite impressive, but I'm in a different place now. Is that even possible?

It sounds absurd, doesn't it? That's what Hebrews tells us happens. That's how deceitful our hearts can be. None of us can presume on past experience or the soundness of our church.

These guys heard Moses preach to them. or the ministers we've heard. These guys heard Moses preach to them. Whatever it might be that we think, well, because I grew up in that family or I went to that church or was part of that group or I read that translation of the Bible or whatever it might be, we cannot presume on the basis of those things that we are in the right with God.

How do you know that you're in the right with God? You hear his voice and today you heed what it says and you follow it wherever it leads no matter what.

That's actually the basis of what it means to believe. Chapter 4 verse 3, have a look. 4 verse 3, for good news came to us just as them, them being a wilderness generation, but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith to those who listen.

[22 : 34] For we who have believed enter that rest. the root of all of our problems is that we believe other things over God's word.

He speaks to us in scripture. Today we open it up and we read it and then we do what our first parents did in the garden. We say, did God really say that thing?

Does what appears to be absolutely crystal clear and obvious here really mean what it says?

because you know, I really like living this way and what I read here seems to rule that out, so it can't mean that.

There are scandalous and really obvious ways that people do that, but all of us, if we're honest with ourselves, are tempted in that direction. We battle hard, wandering, faithless hearts, and so we need to watch out.

God's voice has never been more accessible to us than it is now. You can listen to it, you can read it, you can access it in all kinds of different formats, listen to it today and heed what it says.

[23 : 49] Now the author knows heed God's word today, that's how you cultivate a faithful heart, that's the first step, but the author knows that we can't do this on our own, and he doesn't expect us to either. The second aspect of cultivating a faithful heart, 313, exhort one another every day as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The first aspect of cultivating a faithful heart is heed God's word today, the second is heed God's word together. You were never meant to make the pilgrimage to glory, to your rest on your own, because you wouldn't be able to do it on your own.

Some of you think you will, but you're wrong, sin is really deceitful, and we are all really prone to being self deceived. The house that God built is the church. If you belong to that house, you should belong in a meaningful way to a local church.

We all need to belong to a group of people who will exhort us every day that God gives us breath. As long as there are days called today, we need one another to exhort us towards a deeper and a more faithful devotion to him.

alongside that, the clearest foretaste of that future rest is experienced now when we gather each Lord's Day. 4 verse 9, there remains a Sabbath rest for those who have entered the rest of belonging to Christ.

[25 : 14] You enter your rest when you put your faith in Jesus, but there remains a Sabbath rest that future day, and it is on the Lord's Day when we come together under the preaching of God's Word.

Look at chapter 4 verse 12. For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Where is the two-edged sword of God's Word unleashed in the context where God has promised that he will visit that by his Spirit?

It is when the church gathers. And it is here where that work is going on, where the Spirit of God recalibrates our hearts to keep us going so that we make it to glory.

I want to suggest that the main today of Hebrews 4 is the today of the Lord's Day. There is nowhere more important than you can be on a Sunday.

[26 : 18] Look at the work that is happening, verse 12, when God's Word is opened and proclaimed, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It is there that we bring our hearts, we lay our hearts bare before God's Word. He searches us, He recalibrates us and changes us and urges us on to glory. If you're holding fast to the faithful Son, you have entered your rest.

You know a measure of contentment and satisfaction and joy, but there remains a rest that you don't want to miss. You don't want to miss. So we must strive on.

Allow God's living and active Word to search us, to search us together each Lord's Day and to cultivate a heart of faith that listens and obeys Him all the way to glory, all the way to contentment in its fullest sense, to joy in its fullest sense, to the rest of the power and presence of God.

Let me say in closing a word to those among us who are a bit more sensitive. Now these warnings exist here because our hearts are prone to wander, but I know that some of you are prone to doubt.

[27 : 36] And you worry, chapter 3, verse 12, that you have an evil, unbelieving heart that's going to lead you to fall away from the living God. You worry that you're not really a Christian.

You stumble, you get up again, you think, right, I'm going to keep going towards glory and towards this rest, and you stumble again and you think, maybe I'm not a Christian. Saving faith, faith that will get you to glory, looks to Christ and His promises.

It looks to Christ and His promises. It doesn't focus on the presence or the absence of faith itself. So the idea, me believing is not the object of faith, Christ is.

So yes, if you think about it like this, out of your peripheral vision, by all means ask the question, do I trust Christ? Am I aware of my sin in the way I should be? Do I believe that Christ died for my sins and rose again for my justification?

Do I repent of sin when I know that I'm aware of it? Look at those questions out of your peripheral vision. But as you look straight on and look, you must look to Christ and trust Him. He is the object of your faith.

[28 : 46] Remember what the children were told a few minutes ago. What has He done that is left for you to do? Zero. He took it all. Look to Christ and keep trusting Him and don't overthink it.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said this, do you doubt whether you're elected to salvation? Then say your prayers, man, and you may conclude that you are. It is as easy as that.

Let's pray together.