

The Book of Hebrews

Lesson 4: Entering God's Rest; the Living Word; Our High Priest -- Hebrews 4:1-16

Most of us are tired in a way that sleep does not touch. You can get eight hours and still wake up weary, because the tiredness is not in the body. It is deeper than that. It is the soul-tiredness of always having to prove yourself, always carrying the weight of being enough, always running and never quite arriving. We were made for rest, real rest, the kind that settles the deepest part of you. And the writer of Hebrews says that rest is still on offer. The promise of entering God's rest still stands, he says. The door has not closed.

He has been telling the story of the wilderness generation who failed to enter the promised land, and now he uses it as a doorway into something larger. Canaan was never the final rest. Even after Joshua led the people in, God still spoke of another day, another rest, a Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God. There is a place of settled peace with God that is deeper than any plot of land, and Jesus is the one who leads us into it. The invitation is open today. The only thing that keeps a person out is the same thing that kept that first generation out: unbelief, a heart that will not trust and enter in.

Then the writer says something that should make us sit up straight. The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The Bible is not a dead book of ancient rules. It is alive. It reads us even as we read it. It cuts past our excuses and our self-deceptions and exposes what is really going on inside us. And the writer adds, soberly, that no creature is hidden from God's sight; all are naked and exposed before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

That could be terrifying, to be so completely seen. But the writer does not leave us exposed and trembling. He turns immediately to the best news a tired, exposed, sinful person could hear. We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. And because of Him, we are invited to do the most unlikely thing imaginable: to come boldly. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. The One who sees everything is the One who invites us closest.

Group Discussion: The writer says a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, deeper than any earthly rest. What do you think it means to enter God's rest, and why do so many people, even believers, live without it?

Personal Reflection: Where are you most tired in the deep places of your soul right now, and what would it look like to stop striving and actually trust God enough to rest in that area?

Read Hebrews 4:1-16

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 11 the writer argues that a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God, and that the wilderness generation failed to enter it because of unbelief. What does this passage teach about the rest God offers and how a person enters it?
2. The writer warns us to fear lest any of us seem to have failed to reach God's rest (verse 1) and to strive to enter it (verse 11). Where in your life are you striving in the wrong direction, working hard at things that never satisfy, while neglecting the rest God actually offers?
3. Verse 2 says the gospel came to the wilderness generation just as to us, but the message did not benefit them because it was not united with faith. What does this teach about why simply hearing God's word is not enough, and what must accompany the hearing?
4. Think about the deep rest described in this passage, ceasing from your own works as God did from His. What is one specific area where you tend to rely on your own performance instead of resting in what God has done?
5. Verses 12 and 13 describe the word of God as living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. What does this passage teach about the nature and power of Scripture and how it works on us?
6. The word of God exposes what is really in our hearts, and verse 13 says we are naked and exposed before the eyes of God. How does it affect you to know that God sees you completely, and can you let that truth become a comfort rather than a threat?
7. Verses 14 through 16 describe Jesus as a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, who sympathizes with our weaknesses, having been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. What does this teach about who our high priest is and what He is like?
8. The writer says that because Jesus understands our weakness, we can draw near with confidence to receive mercy and grace in time of need. What keeps you from coming to God boldly when you are weak or have failed, and how does this passage answer that hesitation?
9. Verse 15 says our high priest was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin, and verse 14 calls Him Jesus, the Son of God. Why is it essential that our high priest be both fully human, able to sympathize and be tempted, and fully divine, the Son of God who passed through the heavens, and what would we lose if either were untrue?
10. Look back across the whole chapter. The writer moves from a warning about missing God's rest to the open invitation to draw near to the throne of grace. Name one specific way you will respond this week, whether by entering His rest, letting His word search you, or drawing near to your high priest in a place of need.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 2:1-3, God resting on the seventh day as the pattern of Sabbath rest; Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus inviting the weary to come to Him for rest; Psalm 139:1-12, the God who searches and knows us completely; Hebrews 10:19-22, the confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus; Isaiah 55:1-3, the invitation to come to God and find your soul satisfied.