

Hebrews chapter 4. We have tons to cover and it is a complex text. And so, let me pray, and then we'll get right after it. "Father, give us clarity today. I think that's my prayer, give us clarity and help us see and understand and change the way we see and operate. We love You. Amen."

After the 9:00, a lady walked up to me, and I'm piggy-backing off of what Josh said last week. I had a lady walk up afterwards, it was her first time, and she said, "Hey, I was so blessed this morning. You have a real feminine quality about you." So, I'm going to get a scar this week and an eye patch, and I plan on smoking next week when I'm up here. So anyway, I was like, "What? What are you thinking, man? I mean, even if it's true...."

So, the last two weeks and carrying on into this week, we've come out of this picture that God's given us of Israel being led out of Egypt right up to the banks of the land that God had promised them. And it was a land that was going to make them very wealthy and very powerful. And He brought them right up to the land, and He basically destroyed Egypt, which was no small feat, the most powerful nation on the earth probably. And He quite handily, in a very easy way, disposed of Egypt. And He gets Israel right up to the river, right so they could see the land that He had promised them, and He said, "Okay, go take it." And they said, "Well, let's send spies first." And so, they sent spies over, twelve of them. The twelve came back and ten of them said, "Um, the people over there are really tall. We shouldn't do this." And that's really how the story reads. If you go read, they complained about their height. And so, God, very lovingly says, "But remember last week, when I killed Egypt, right? And remember the whole Red Sea parting thing, you guys went through it, destroying the army? Do you guys remember that? I think I can handle 6'5'"

They didn't want it. And so, the Lord said, "Okay, fine." They wandered about in the desert for forty years until that entire generation died out, and then their kids got to go into the rest in the promise. Now, what's happened the last three weeks, out of this text in Hebrews, is God is taking this story and He's laying it on top of our lives. And He's saying, "There are some similarities and there are some dangers that you should be aware of." And so, we talked, two weeks ago when I was here, about this invitation from God into rest, into His house. And the house of God is not, now follow me, is not a building. It is not made of bricks and mortar and concrete and shingles. It's not made of those things. The house of God is a people, and God has invited us into the rest of His house. And the way I tried to paint the picture for you is, in my home, there is that middle cushion in the couch that just is home for me. When I am there, I'm safe, I don't have to pretend, I don't have to be anybody but me, I am known, I am loved, weakness and strength, all of me is known and I'm safe there.

And this is the invitation that goes out from God, "Come be healed, come find wholeness, come find rest for the weight that is on your soul." Then Josh came in last week, and he said, "Okay, today if you hear His voice, if He calls to you, then be obedient so you're not hardened, unless you become a believer but never find the rest that God invites you to, unless you go right up to the banks of the river and look into the promise land and don't go in." And so that's what Josh talked about, the nature of the heart, last week. And then, this week, we're going to continue on with the idea that Jesus had invited you into healing and wholeness and repair and restoration and salvation, that this invitation has gone out. Because Jesus shows up on the scene in the 1st Century and in Matthew 11, He says, "Hey, those of you who are heavy laden, those of you who are burdened, those of you who are weighted down, come and find rest in Me." When He shows up on the scene and says this, this is not the first time this has been said. In fact, what we're about to read in Hebrews 4 is

an extremely wordy, complex historical list of how often God has tried to communicate to you and me that He longs for you to find wholeness and healing. Alright? Because this message, of “those of you who are heavy laden, those of you who are burdened, those of you who are overwhelmed, come into the souls home, come and find rest for your soul.” This invitation has been painted on the canvas of creation over and over and over and over again, and what I want to do is, I want to, just as brief as I can, sketch out the history of God trying to communicate this to mankind via this text. And then I want us to go back and put the meat in it and talk about what it means. Okay? So, that’s the agenda for this morning.

Hebrews 4, starting in verse 1. There are going to be five points of history mentioned here. Verse 1, “Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.” See, this is a very wordy text, and it’s just going to get a lot worse before it gets better. Verse 4 is our first historic moment where God communicates rest. “For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day...” And this has always been funny to me because whoever wrote this book, Paul or Luke, is very very versed in Hebrew history. So they’re like, “I dunno, I read somewhere...” He knows exactly where he read it, and he’s got some humility here. So, he says in verse 4, “For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.’” So, God, in creation, literally on the seventh day of everything, God begins to communicate this idea of rest and wholeness and repair, of salvation. God toils and gets after it and creates and creates and creates.....and finally stops and rests. And you gotta do some thinking on this, because it’s a funny deal that God’s resting. Because He doesn’t get tired. I mean, God’s never had to go, “Whew! That one did me in.” He’s just never had to put the hands on the back of the neck to get air into His lungs. He has never needed to rest. So, He’s communicating something here; He’s painting a picture here. We talk about it all the time. He’s communicating visually. The language we usually use is, He is weaving into the fabric of the universe how things are. So, literally from day seven, God is saying, “There is a rest for you. There is a place where all the weight, toil and hurt of this world can be removed. There is rest for you.” Day seven, Adam’s 24 hours old and God’s goes, “There’s rest.” Look, the Fall hasn’t even occurred. There’s rest. God’s communicating it right out of the gate.

Alright, verse 5 is the second point in history when God communicates this. Verse 4 was at creation; verse five is this, “and again in this passage, ‘they shall not enter My rest.’ Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience.” So, he’s referencing the story that we’re in again, the story of Israel coming up to the line and not crossing it into rest. So, the promise land, this land flowing with milk and honey, which means nothing to you and me. But what it means is the sweetness and sustenance of life there. There is the sweetness of life and there is the sustenance of life both there in the promise land, that this promise land represents what God wants for the soul. There is this place of healing, there is this place of wealth, there is this place of belonging. Here it is, and because you’re disobedient, you’re not getting in, but here it is. So, you’ve got creation and now you’ve got the promise land, both God painting a picture on the canvas of creation that He desires for you to find wholeness and healing for your soul. He’s going to keep on going.

Verse 7, “He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’” So, verse 7 we’ll get to in a minute, but now for verse 8, “For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.” So, what happens next is, God communicates in creation that He wants salvation; He then communicates in the promise land that He wants men to be saved, He then, if you know the story, Moses goes up on the hill sees the promise land and dies on the mountain, never gets to go into the promise land. So Joshua, and you gotta love the humor in the story I think, Joshua goes, “Okay, we’re going into the promise land.” And the Scriptures tell us that they had no fighting men and no weapons. And so, Joshua’s got Jericho just on the other side of the river. And so, he prays and says, “God, what should we do?” And God goes, “Do

you have a marching band? You have a bunch of band kids? Okay, good. Here's what I want you to do, get them dressed up, ploomy hat and all, and have them march across the water and have them loop around the deal. Alright?" And if you don't think that crowd wasn't going, "Gosh, I wish Moses was here. This guy's going to get us killed." Joshua then leads Israel across the river and into the promise land, but, now here's what I think is so significant about this, there was going to be difficulties in the promise land. Here's what nobody ever thinks about. They had to go fight these nations, and here's the deal, it wasn't like they weren't losing men. I don't know that anybody's ever dwelt on that. It's not like these big battles are occurring and the Israelites are incurring no losses. Men are dying. And so, they're going, "Wait a minute. I thought this was the promise land?" And God's going, "It is. It is a picture of that...I will...you will get this land, but you're going to fight for it, let's work for it, let's go get it." In fact, nobody set up camp, because he didn't want to happen was, right on the other side of the river, one guy to go, "This is my land right here." And then everyone else had to keep going forward fighting, while he hung out right by the river. And so, God said, "No, everybody's got to go until all the land is yours."

And so, what's happening here is this, God's saying, now this is big, "Don't worship the picture; don't worship the shadow; worship who's casting it." The promise land was just another picture on the canvas of creation. It was the pinnacle of the soul's rest. It was just a picture of it. And can't tell you how often, it's been my experience, that people, the more time they spend in church, begin to worship the shadows rather than the forms. Like let me give you an example. I had a conversation with a little girl, God bless her, who's really struggling right now, and she came to service several months ago and then left on a Sunday night and then just went and took a walk on the dark side if you will. She just came into my office, just heart-broken the next week, talking about how she doesn't know why she does this. And I always try to just figure out what's going on, so "How can you do it? How can you go from this moment where you feel near to God and you feel close to Him right an hour later in what you were into?" And she said, "Well, I didn't....I think it's okay, because I didn't do communion." Okay, so you've got this symbol, you've got this picture of Christ indwelling in us, and she thinks that's the important piece, the picture's the important piece. The picture's not the important piece. The shadow's not as important as what's casting that shadow. So, be careful. Cattle, even sacred cattle were given us by God to eat.

You've got God communicating in creation, salvation. You've got God communicating in the promise land salvation. You've got men and women living in wealth, God's still going "There's more." Then you've got David. Remember verse 7? Let's read verse 7 again, "He again fixes a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.'" So here's what's happening now, he is now referencing a point in history where Israel has taken the promise land, they are extremely wealthy, they are extremely powerful, they have an army that can handle anybody that wants to come get a piece of them and David still goes, "Do you still see that wealth and power, security and safety will not remove the burden of life. The soul's still not home. Home for the soul is not wealth and safety. Home for the soul is in Christ. So come on." So God communicates even through David's power, "We're not there yet."

Now, one more period of time. Verse 9, "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." The last time period: 12:01PM Sunday morning, Dallas Texas, The Village Church. The invitation still goes out. The invitation remains, "Come find rest for the soul." So, God's been communicating this. Jesus shows up on the scene, this isn't a new message. This is how things are.

So, go verse one again and let's start filling in the blanks. That was the overview; let's start filling in the blanks. Verse 1 is extremely peculiar, and I'll show you why. "Therefore, let us fear..." Now if you have a NIV Bible, you've got a bad translation. It says, "let us be careful." This is not careful, those two Greek words are nowhere near each other. That's why you can have a paraphrase bible, you can have "The Message" and things like that, but you gotta get a word for word one. Because the NIV, "careful" and "fear" are not the same word. "Careful, that soup is hot." Fear is "put it down!" I

mean, "fear" and "careful" are two completely different ideas and the interpreters of the NIV have done you a disservice, because God's putting a lot more weight here than the NIV wants to put here. I'm not telling you to get a new Bible; I've got a NIV myself. Alright, here we go, "Let us fear..." Does anyone else find it peculiar that God is asking you to be afraid? "Let us fear..." I mean, don't those Scriptures say that perfect love drives out fear? Didn't we, just several weeks ago in Chapter 2, see that God has no part of fear? Why the command of fear all of a sudden? Okay, well let's answer this question first. What should we be afraid of? Okay, "Therefore," When you see a "therefore" in Scripture, you have to ask, "What's the therefore there for?" So, you've got a conclusion occurring here. So, look in Hebrews 3:19, the verse right before verse 1, because here's what we should be afraid of.

"So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." So then, he turns around in Hebrews 4:1 and says "Therefore since their unbelief got dead in the wilderness, then we should be afraid if that unbelief starts firing up in us. So, if we begin to doubt, if we begin to fall away, if we begin to struggle, there should be some fear in our hearts. Because what's at stake? Now, I need to try to bring some clarity to this. And I need to bring some clarity to this because if you're not careful you're going, "So, are you're telling me that ideal Christian living is me always being afraid and worried that I'm outside of rest. Are you telling me that, ideally, what Christ wants for me is to be perpetually questioning whether or not I'm in or out?"

This is the best way I know how to explain it to you. My wife, she's got a Mexican food habit, and she needs like a patch of a nacho or something on her arm. When she was pregnant, it was like 2:30 in the afternoon and we had already eaten lunch and she was like, "I've got to have some Anna Mia's." And if you haven't done pregnancy yet and you're a man, just get in the car. You don't need to, "We already had lunch?" Look at me, get in the car. For the love of all that's holy, get in the car. So, put Audrey in the care, and we head to Anna Mia's.

By the way, we don't live anywhere near Anna Mia's. And we drove to Anna Mia's and had some table-side guacamole and just watched in horror. She's out of town so I can say that. She's eating the guacamole, ordered some enchiladas and we eat. We eat, walk out the door and my daughter, she's right behind me, and I walk out the door, and we're parked right in front because few people eat lunch at 2:30 in the afternoon. And we walk out, and it was my car and another car and a big Ford 250 Supercab deal right here. And I walk down and I pass my door and open the back door and I turn around and Audrey's not there. Audrey went down the side of the Ford 250. So, I immediately run to the back and I see another car coming through the parking lot, and I can basically hear my daughter running down the side of the deal. And so, I panicked and I run, full speed, and I intercept her right as she's getting to the back of the truck. And I grab her, and my heart is racing. And I get right down on a knee and I go, "Look at me. Look at my face. Look at my face..." And she's already crying because I'm so freaked out. "Don't ever, ever, ever, ever run into the street. The street is very dangerous. You could be hurt if not outright killed. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

And I know, some of you are like, "Man, your kid's going to be in therapy." Okay, look at me, all of you. Better alive and in therapy than dead and not. So, we have the talk and she's still kind of crying and I hold her and you do that thing where you're going, "I love you, and I don't know that daddy would make it if something happened to you. So, the street is not your friend. Don't go near the street. Alright?" "Okay. Yeth, thir." And we go to our house, and I'm working outside...I was watering the flowers, but after the feminine comment I'm gun shy. "I was rebuilding our V8 and..." And Audrey's got this little princess ball and we're kicking it back and forth. It's a real light ball and I was kicking it off of her and she would giggle and laugh and then throw it at me and we were just having a good time in the yard just playing. Finally, I kick it at her and it hits her, hits our mailbox and rolls out into the street, and she took two steps and then stopped. And you can tell, all of a sudden, she's starting to well up, because this is one hour after what happened. And then she doesn't know now what we're going to do about the ball, so she's sad about her princess ball. And so, I'm like, "No, no, no. Okay, here we go." And I grab her hand and we do the, "Okay, look...no. Look...no. Okay, let's go get the ball." And we go get the ball.

And you know what, as soon as we got back into the yard, we start playing with the ball again. So, I think this is the kind of fear we're talking about, and here's what I mean. It's the kind of fear that makes you feel safe when you are where you're supposed to be. It's not like my daughter was in the yard going, "The street's right there. What should we do about the street?" It's not like that night, she's laying in bed going, "I know the street's right outside that window. I know it's there." That's not how it's happening. She's not aware of the street at all when she's playing on the playground. She's not aware of the street at all when she's where she's supposed to be. She's not afraid of the street until the ball's there. Then she goes right up to it, and she's tempted, because she loves the ball, to take a step in. Then all of a sudden, she remembers. All of a sudden, she's afraid. This is what I think this is like.

I'll do my own journey. We don't live our lives everyday going, "Oh, I sure hope I'm saved. I don't know if I'm saved." I mean, I think Jesus wants assurance for us. I think He wants assurance for those who are His children. But I think what happens in my own journey is, all the junk that's in my father and his father and his father and his father is in me. It's there, and I wish it wasn't, but it's there. And it seems to get louder as I get older. I don't know what it is about that. If you've got wisdom, shoot me an e-mail, buy me some coffee. As I get older, it's like those voices get louder so you have to press into the Lord even more. And when those things creep in, I get scared because I want all the hurt and the pain to die with me. I don't want to impart it to mine; I want it to go in the ground with me. And so, I pick up the phone and call Jerry Meade at the Center for Christian Counseling, I go have a cup of coffee with Patterson or Bleecker, I sit down with my small group and go, "For whatever reason right now, this is wooing me...For whatever reason right now, I'm struggling here....For whatever reason right now, this is...." And I want be afraid, because I might just get killed.

Verse 2 is really interesting too, no intriguing actually. Verse 2, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also;..." Okay, so what they're saying here is, God came to Israel and said, "There's rest for your soul, there's salvation for you, there's healing for you, there's wholeness for you." And He's saying in this text that the same invitation Israel received, you and I have received. But look at the next line, the next line's extremely interesting. "...but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." So, what he's saying happened here is the invitation went out, the invitation went out, healing, wholeness, fullness, and they even got to see it. They got to stand at the banks, look across the river and see this land that God had for them. And they said, "I don't believe that this will end well for us if we cross this river." Now, here's something that I'm working through as the last three years pastoring. I always hear preachers talk about how we have so little faith in God, that we don't think God can do is, we don't think God can deliver, but do you want to hear my honest assessment and opinion after three years of the human factor in ministry? I don't think that we question God; I think we question us. I don't think we doubt that God can do mighty things; I think our doubt is that He wants to and will do them in us...in me. It's like, "Salvation, healing wholeness, it's for everybody else, but not me, because the dudes over there are 6'5". It's not for me." I mean, I can't tell you how many people I know live their faith vicariously through someone else. I can't tell you how many people I know who love to be around the good story. I want my own good story. I want my own healing; I want my own freedom; I want my own story. Praise God for yours; I want to hear yours, but I want my own. Faith says, "I'll take this step out, because I know that He can heal." Faith says, "I'll confess this, even though it's embarrassing." Faith says, "I need some help. I'm going to get some, either at counseling or a friend. I cannot beat this. I'm moving. I'm doing something." Faith says, "As bleak as it looks, He'll deliver on pressing in." Faith says, "Let's cross the river." Faith says, "I guess the band will have to do." Faith says, "I can be whole." Faith says, "It can die with me."

Okay, so how? So how? A legitimate question. Because these are very romantic ideas, are they not? They're very romantic ideas. How? Alright, flip over to Hebrews 4:11, "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest..." So, now you've got...because listen, we preach grace nonstop here. Sometimes I think we need to balance it out with a little bit more responsibility. Because we have got a lot of people waving the banner of grace under their sinful deplorable lives and not moving to me healed and made whole, all under the banner of "I'm alright...I mean, I haven't entered into the Lord's

rest, but I'm alright." So, he's going to say, "be diligent" here, this is action. "...be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart," which is why that's scary. Look at verse 13, "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Now let me tell you why this is a scary deal. If you are disciplined enough, you can white knuckle the outside of your life to look pretty attractive. You can. Church folk have been doing it for centuries. You can, with enough will power, white knuckle your outsides to look righteous, but no man can change the soul. No one can change the intention of the heart, which is why Jesus' teachings were so horrifying. Because He goes, "Oh, you've heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery,' but if you're still lustful all the time, you got the same sin inside of you, you haven't solved the problem. You've heard it said, 'Do not murder,' but I say if you're always in a rage, you're not whole, you're not home, you're definitely in rest, you're furious all the time." Jesus is going to make it a matter of the heart. So, what does He say to do? The Word of God is living and active. And so, some of you are going, "Oh gosh, so this is another 'read the Bible more' thing." Yes, it is. That's exactly what it is.

I love music. I'm not good at it at all. My wife's great at it. I can't play an instrument. I've tried dozens of times, but I like music that is thick. I like it to say something, to mean something. That's why I'm having a hard time with popular radio right now. I'm getting older, and I just don't quite get the beauty behind "I'm In Love with a Stripper," which is the No.1 downloaded song in the country, right behind "My Humps." So, I just don't quite understand that somebody actually sat down and went, "Hmmm, let's write about life. I know, I'm in love with a stripper. Now, put a groove behind that and we'll just say it over and over again." So, Michael Stipe, who's the former lead singer of R.E.M., and Chris Martin, who's the lead singer for Coldplay, released a song a couple of weeks ago called "In the Sun." And I don't know what their spiritual journey is, but there's a line in that song that I thought was so rich and so real and whether or not they meant it to be about Christ doesn't matter because "All things are mine because I am of Christ and Christ is of God," which means, "There's truth in there, so it's mine." And so, that line says, "And when you showed me myself, I became someone else." And that's one of the things that happens in light of Scripture. When you sit down and you eat it, I'm not talking about read it when you read the newspaper, I'm talking about "lay your life on top, let it read you." When you sit down and eat it, it's like standing in front of a mirror, a soul mirror. And what happens is I am an impassioned believer that you will never full on desire and chase Jesus until you understand and have seen your own depravity. And it's only in that moment when you understand how dark this thing goes that finally grace becomes this really powerful agent in the heart. And the Word, the thing that the Scriptures do is they put you in front of the spiritual mirror where you see what is right and good and righteous and life giving, and what will take away from that rest? This is where He tells us to start. I think there's more to this, but this is where He tells us to start.

Now, if you're in here and going, "Yeah Matt, I hear this all the time. I have the hardest time studying the Bible, I have the hardest time reading Scripture, I have the hardest time getting in..." Listen, good news, you're in the Bible Belt, which means there's a new Bible study firing off every 4.7 seconds. Oh, did you hear that? Every time a bell rings another Bible study starts. So, you've got Tommy Nelson on Tuesday, you've got Lakeland, I'm here on Thursday mornings, you've got tons of home group Bible studies, you've got Bible study fellowships everywhere. Get to where you can let the Word read you, and then be diligent. Be diligent, which means we're not trying to memorize a bunch of facts and stories. I know a lot of pagans who could whoop me in Bible drill. We want it to read us. We want to walk away and go, "That text laid on top of my soul. Where am I?" And if we're not there, fear, good healthy fear so we don't get run over in the road.

So literally from day seven, God takes His paintbrush and begins to paint this idea of salvation, rest and wholeness. He's drawn the same thing with different characters over and over and over and over again throughout the Scriptures. And the same invitation is extended today to you, to me. And so, today let us be afraid if we have not entered His rest.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women, and I thank You for an opportunity just to get together and to talk about You and talk about how good You are and talk about the invitation that You have given to us. And I have to believe that I have some friends in here today that don't know You or maybe they didn't know that this thing is about a relationship with You and not just some kind of intellectual, "Yeah, I know. Okay." And if that's you in here today, I can tell you the place that you start is simply by asking Jesus to help. I mean, that's where you start. There's no magic thing that needs to be said. It's not like witchcraft; we don't say the right things and then, all of a sudden, magic happens. But it's more of really laying your heart out and going, "Okay Jesus, I need Your help, I need Your forgiveness. If this rest is available for me, I want to be obedient. And so, let me encourage you, maybe on the ride home, maybe in here right now, just that quick prayer, "I need Your help. If this is true, if this invitation is out there, then I want it." And then, I always encourage you, if you know somebody who loves Jesus very much, it's a great idea to go, "Hey man, I asked Jesus to let me in that rest." I think they'll lead you to the next point. Father, I thank You for cold mornings. And I thank You for rest, I thank You for the invitation, I thank You for Your promises. Help us believe them, increase our faith, increase our diligence. You are lovely, Father, lovely. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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