

Good Morning. My name is David. I am one of the partners here at St Mark's. I would like to welcome you if this is your first time at our service. You would have received a pamphlet with today's passage Hebrews chapter 4 because that's where we will be spending most of our time.

Before I begin let me pray

Holy Father. We look forward to the day when you come in glory. Keep us faithful to that day. We pray that by your inspired word, your word of truth you will work in our hearts and if need be you will rebuke us, reprove us and train us in righteousness. We pray all this in your son's name. Amen

Last week in Hebrews Chapter 3 we saw the great promise for the Israelites in the Exodus. They had enjoyed God's mercy when he led them out of slavery in Egypt.

They had the privilege of being his treasured people at Mt Sinai, and heard him speak when he gave them the law. There was the promise that they will enter the promised land of Canaan where they could receive rest from their enemies. However despite all these blessings and God's mercy to them already, the people of Israel hardened their hearts. They rebelled against God and did not trust his promises. They did not take God at his word. The last verses in chapter 3 summaries the result of their disobedience.

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

Their rebellion meant God banished them in the wilderness for forty years. Until the generation who were saved during the Exodus, all died off. They had experienced God's redeeming power and seen his mighty work, from the plagues to the parting of the red sea. Despite all this, the people of Israel remained in their rebellion. God's word came true. They had not realised the promise of entry into the Promised Land. They could not experience God's rest because of their unbelief.

Despite the failure of the people of Israel, God's promise still remains. The promise of entering his rest. We read of this in the first two verses of Chapter 4:

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. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that the promise of God of entering his rest still stands. What God promises will come to fruition.

As this promise still stands this provides an encouragement for the readers of the letter to endure in their faith. Our faith is not in vain. God's rest is not a broken promise. But on the one hand there is encouragement to persevere, on the other hand there is a warning. A warning that there is a possibility they will miss out. Of falling short of entering God's rest.

And we have the vivid example of the people saved from slavery in Egypt. They fell short of entering the Promised Land. They did not trust God's promises.

We read of promises made to God's people after he had rescued them in the exodus like those found in Exodus chapter 19.

The promise that God who delivered them out of the land of Egypt, would make them his people That he would make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if only they will obey his voice.

But the wilderness generation received God's promises in vain. They did not obey his voice and keep his covenant.

Here is a short history of what happened to the Israelites after God gave them the promises in Exodus 19. After they had received the law at Mt Sinai, Moses sent spies to see what awaited them in the land of Canaan. The spies saw indeed it was flowing with milk and honey. Flowing just like God had promised. But there were giants living there. The spies came back and reported everything they had seen and that there were giants. God promised the nation of Israel if they enter the land he will give them victory over the giants. Imagine for a second if you were there to hear the report from the spies And you hear the promise of God? How will you react?

Instead of trusting God the people would not enter the land. They got cold feet. They said it would be better for them to go back to slavery. They feared defeat. Imagined that, God's promises is right before them. He says he will give them victory. Yet they turned their back from all the blessings of God before them. They turned back to slavery. So God judges them and declares this generation will not get into the Promised Land. And God's judgement on them was that generation was to die off in the wilderness over forty years. They will never enter God's rest.

Like the wilderness generation, the readers of Hebrews live in light of the promises of God. Promises found in his gospel. But the lessons from the wilderness generation are clear. It is not the hearing of the promises by itself that saves them. Hearing is of no value on its own. It is the hearing that leads to faith and belief that is effective. We have the words of God in the bible. He has sent his son to die for our sins. He rose to life again and is now seated at right hand of God. Continue to trust in him. Don't turn back to our life of slavey to Sin. It is faith in God's word that will bring salvation, the entry in God's rest. God's word can't be treated lightly.

And what is this rest that the passage is speaking about. This is what we read about in Verse 3 to 5

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.’”[b]

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.”[c] 5 and again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

First the passage reminds us that the wilderness generation failed to enter the rest. It was not till several hundred years later that King David, the second king of Israel, leads the people to conquest over the land. It was then they were able to finally achieve peace in the Promised Land.

And the author of Hebrews uses Psalm 95 to make his point. A psalm written by King David. The generation lead out of Egypt by Moses disobeyed God. In judgement God declared

in his anger they will not enter the Promised Land, his rest. It was not because it was not yet available to them. In fact it had been available since the work of creation ended.

But what does that mean?

Notice how the rest is referred to. It is not called “the rest”. It is called “my rest”. It’s the very rest that God himself enjoys. The rest he still enjoys after creating the world.

In Genesis chapter 1 we will remember that the world is created in six days. He creates the skies, the seas, animals, humans and so forth. And then in Genesis chapter 2 we hear about the seventh day.

In Genesis chapter 2 we see that

“On the seventh day God rested from all his works.” God saw that all his work of creation were completed and it was very good. So God goes to rest from creation.

We often think that the pinnacle of creation is the creation of humans. That is not the case. The pinnacle of Creation, is God’s rest when all that God has created is complete and perfect. The goal of humanity is that it will enter God’s rest. And the remarkable thing is we are still in God’ seventh day of creation

See in each of the first six day of creation we see that there was evening and morning to mark a day as completed. So for example in day one we see:

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

God created light and there was evening and morning. A complete day.

And we see this throughout the next five days of creation.

And so we see in day five God creates the fish of the sea and the birds of the air (put Genesis passage on slide). And again we see the day in creation end, and there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

But when we come to the seventh day we see something different.

In Genesis chapter 2 we read:

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

After God has finished creation he rests. Notice how there is no end to this seventh day. There is no morning and night. God begun his rest then. And his rest still continues. The seventh day has not ended. We are still in the seventh day of creation. It is not that God nodded off on the seventh day then the eighth day came and God resumed his work of creation.

What God has rested from is creating. See God had been at work since the beginning until now, sustaining the world, upholding the world, caring and ruling the world. But God has not created new heavens and new earths. He stopped his work of creation after the sixth day of creation. He hasn't restarted creation because we are still in the seventh day, God at rest.

And humanity is invited to enter into that rest with God. Where humanity is in right relationship with God and at peace with each other. The seventh day God blessed and made holy.

And God's rest is still opened to God's people today. But it begs the question where is the rest that Hebrews is talking about. Let's read the next few verse.

Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

**"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts."[d]**

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.

There still remains the promised rest for those who believe. It remains open for some to enter.

That is the reason many centuries after the wilderness generation had died off, David wrote Psalm 95. He urged the people to continue to listen and obey God. He warned them to not harden their hearts or they too will fail to enter God's rest. The writer of Hebrews brings home the warning written by David and applies it today. Today we are to listen to God's voice. Today we are not to harden our hearts against God. Today if we trust God we can enter God's rest. We are to listen to God's word today and to believe it today.

And if we believe what do we look forward to if we hear and obey? We read

9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

It is not a physical rest that awaits the people of God. But a Sabbath Rest. As we have seen God entered a Sabbath rest on the seventh day of creation. He rested from all his work of creation. Just as humans observe a Sabbath, a rest day once a week, on the seventh day of creation God began his Sabbath Rest, a Sabbath rest from creation. And as we have seen that day has not ended for God. He is still in his rest, a rest that is eternal.

And the people of God who enter it also rests from their work. Whilst sometimes work and life brings joy, often it brings burden, heart ache, tears and pain. Our life is marred by Sin. But the promise of God is that there is something much greater to look forward to for his people.

A rest where humanity can enjoy an unspoiled relationship with God. A rest most clearly illustrated in Revelation chapter 21 where we are promised a new heaven and new earth, where God will dwell with his people. Where all the muck and gunk of this world will be no more, as God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, where there will be no more death, nor pain, nor mourning. The rest is heaven itself.

And so back to Hebrews we are reminded of the failure of Israel to obtain it because of sin and disobedience. However, it is for us a reality for us if we believe. And it is possible for all who come to Jesus. For he promises those who come to him, he will give them rest, God's rest

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11). Jesus is the one who has dealt with Sin once and for all. If you trust in Christ Jesus'

death you are forgiven. Jesus died in our place so that we don't have to face God's anger. You have eternal life and can enter God's rest. To be in the new heaven and new earth where we can be with God forever.

How good is that?

If this is what awaits those who continue to trust in Jesus Christ. If the eternal home is what awaits the people of God, we are urged in the final verses to strive to enter that rest.

Read with me from verse 11:

11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is alive 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.

With the encouragement to strive to enter God's rest comes the sobering warning. The word of God, the word the people of Israel failed to listen to, is not like human words. It is living and effective. Listen to God's word.

But the writer is saying something more about God's word. The word judges us. Here it is described as sharper than a double edged sword. The word of God is not powerless. It pierces our hearts. As the passage says the word is sharper than the sharpest sword. It can cut deep into our body, our heart and our soul. It sees our inner most being. Every thought and intention is not hidden from the word. It exposes us totally before God.

See it's easy for us to put a respectable front to appear Christians. We could come to church each Sunday. We could help out at Anglicare or Mary Andrews Village. We might say a prayer each night and help out at the fete. But God's word will see us not only at these times. But will be able to see deep in our hearts to know our true thoughts and intentions. It will expose before God what we do in secret thinking no one will know. Those times we sit in our room alone watching pornography, those times we lust after another's wife, that time we covet power and idolise money. All will be exposed before God. It will render us helpless as we are laid bare before God.

Last weekend I was in Queenstown, New Zealand. And when I arrived the country laid out the welcome mat and open arms. Customs wanted to speak to my friend and I. And so the next one and a half hour they interrogated us. We were innocent, and were eventually allowed to continue, wait start, our holiday. But they asked questions after question to verify if we were genuine tourists. Ask me later. It was a great trip and I went bungee jumping. But back to customs. As more questions were asked it became increasingly more personal. Our personal lives were exposed. It was laid bare. But each time we could truthfully answer. What are you doing here? Holidays. Have you ever used drugs? No. Why have you got no itinerary for your trip? We are guys so we are never organised.

The word of God will be much more penetrating. We will not be able to give an excuse for all we have thought and done. It will expose our hearts. There will be no hiding. We won't just find it hard to talk. We will be rendered speechless as every part of our lives are laid out before God. Every thought,

intention and action all presented before God. God help us!
Who can possibly enter God's rest?

That is why we look to Jesus the founder and author of our salvation. Jesus died on the cross so that our sins are forgiven. Jesus died in our place so that we don't have to face God's judgement. If you trust in Christ Jesus' death you are forgiven. You have eternal life and are part of God's rest. Heaven itself

As Jesus said "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Let us then come to Jesus and enter God's rest through him.
Amen