

Hebrews 4:1-13 – Running Toward Rest – Lesson Summary

Directions can be a funny thing. Some of us will follow them directly, others in pieces, and some not at all. People may question our response to directions, but there is little doubt that poor directions lead to confusion and failing to reach the final destination. Failing to follow good directions often produces a similar result. In the beginning verses of Heb. 4 the author provides a roadmap to finding true spiritual rest. In doing so, he challenges his audience to live differently than their ancestors who refused to follow God's direction and didn't find rest. His purpose in these verses is to show his audience how they can run toward true rest.

Heb. 3 and 4 function as a mini sermon on Psalm 95. Heb. 4:1-13 is the author's conclusion to his challenge to live differently than their ancestors as he provides **3 specific ways in which we can enter God's rest**. Our first step toward rest is to **enter God's rest by faith** (vs.1-20). As if to answer the obvious question, faith in what, the author declares that we must have faith in the message of the Gospel, the good news that God is faithful to provide deliverance from our sin through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In challenging his audience, the author addresses *4 key truths about how we relate to the Gospel*.

First, *hearing the Gospel is not enough*. In the second half of verse 2 we see that the message the Israelites heard did not benefit them because they did not respond. Are you content to just hear the message of the Gospel? Secondly, *the only appropriate response to the Gospel is faith*. It was their lack of faith that contributed to their inability to find rest. Are you listening to the Gospel with a heart of faith? Do you believe the promises of God to be true despite your circumstance? Where Israel doubted God's promise due to their circumstances, we are being challenged to have faith that God's promises are found complete in Christ. Thirdly, *faith in the Gospel is much more than intellectual*. The author is well aware of his audience's history. As former Jews, many of them would know the OT scriptures. They would likely have an intellectual understanding of God but could easily miss a heart transformation from God. An intellectualized Gospel leads to pride and arrogance and a lack of need for God's deliverance. Finally, the author continues to challenge his audience to see that *the Gospel is perfectly consistent in both the OT and NT*. The message spoken of in verse 2 has been the same message that was preached before, is being preached now, and will be preached in the future. The Gospel is an eternal message about God's deliverance and the rest we can find through it.

The second step is to **enter God's rest with urgency** (4:3-1). In verse 7 the author uses the word "today". He doesn't say, at some point, in your own time, or when you get a chance. Instead, he speaks with a great level of urgency. Today, respond to the Gospel in faith. Today, make your priority Christ. Today, allow God to take the position of authority in your life. Do not let the things of this world draw your attention away from your current need of the Gospel. Today, find rest in Christ.

The last step is to **enter God's rest through the Word** (4:11-13). God reveals Himself through His Word which reveals our sinful hearts. When we understand the true nature of our sin, we recognize that our only hope is Christ. It's not enough to simply hear the message. We must respond with faith that goes beyond an intellectual understanding of God and instead, through the convicting power of the Word of God. Are you pursuing rest through the Gospel? Or, like the Israelites, are you pursuing rest somewhere else?

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What were some directions that God gave the Israelites? How did they respond to them? Where did they lose their way? What did this reveal about their hearts?
- 2) What are some the directions that God has given you and I? How do you respond to them? Where do you or I often lose our way? What does this reveal about our hearts?
- 3) Why do you think so many of us try to "work" toward God's favor? How do you struggle in this way?
- 4) How are you encouraged by the fact that we can rest in the promises of the Gospel? How does this truth actually challenge you to live with a greater urgency to live for Christ?

*This week's lesson outline comes from *Christ Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* by Al Mohler.