

Will You Enter Into Rest? – Hebrews 4

1. The last few weeks, we have mentioned the Valley of Elah as a metaphor for asking Jesus to be our champion and trusting God when things look bleak. As we enter Hebrews 4, we need to remind ourselves for the umpteenth time that chapter and verse divisions were unknown until 1227 when Stephen Langton, a professor at the University of Paris and, later, the Archbishop of Canterbury first divided the Bible into chapters. Much later, 330 years later, in fact, in 1551, a French printer named Robert Stephanus put verse divisions in his Greek New Testament.
2. That is why there can be rather odd divisions – because they were somewhat arbitrary (though they did their best). As we read the beginning of Hebrews chapter 4, we are really following a warning that begins back in chapter 3, verse 7. Back there, we are warned to be open to the Holy Spirit, to listen for His voice, and to keep moving away from unbelief and disobedience. Our faith journey is, in fact, a journey.
3. That warning continues in Hebrews 4:1-13. Once again, we find ourselves in a valley, but this one is a valley of decision. We are in a place where our past is behind us – we have made progress – but we are not yet home. [Hebrews 4:1-2] There are layers of meaning here that we need to peel back one at a time.
4. We are in a room that was paid for by other people. Many of you have CoC roots so you are recipients of a faith structure that was handed to you (forgive me for oversimplifying this for the sake of time). At some time in your life, you will need to make the faith you have YOUR faith and NOT the “Faith of Our Fathers.” I love that song and the meaning behind it, but we need to keep in mind that their faith will not save us.
5. The writer of Hebrews is writing to Jewish Christians who knew their story very, very well. They knew that the entire generation of those who had seen God at work in Egypt and in the Red Sea, who daily ate manna from above and who saw God’s provision time and again...lost faith at the river. Their faith was not strong enough to carry them over that line. (to be fair, it was a scary line)

6. One generation had to die in the wilderness. Now, a new generation had to step up to the river and make a decision. Some would ask to stay on this side and God allowed that – for He never forces anyone to enter His rest. The new generation's faith was greater than that of their fathers and, so, they entered in.
7. But those who refused to go forward after all God had done were told they would have no other chances. God was done with them (and think of the horror of that thought). Hang with me through a very difficult set of verses: [Hebrews 4:3-7]
8. The reasoning here seems odd to us because we are used to our own systems of logic and we are also very conversant with the form of arguments Paul used. This is different. Here, the writer says that God has drawn some lines in the sand. Cross that line now or cross it never; He is done remaking the universe.
9. There has to come a point where you accept that the universe that is here is the universe you've got, and the God who is here is the God you have and there is no other. One of the signs of emotional strength we look for in therapeutic situations is: are they able to accept what is, even if it is painful and even if they would give anything for it to be otherwise? Are they wasting their life by wishing for another life, another situation?
10. God frequently held in front of His people a simple decision: life or death, blessing or cursing, this or that. If they chose death or cursing (by their behavior, rarely by acclamation), God did not rush in to make things right; He let them deal with the consequences of their decision.
11. The writer of Hebrews warns Christians that we have a decision to make – saved people still have to make faith decisions. Will we enter into relationship with Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, our Savior, yes, but also our Lord and our God? Or...will we hesitate when it comes time to put our feet into the water?
12. Joseph Addison first penned the phrase that would eventually morph into "He who hesitates is lost." (originally, "The woman that

deliberates is lost" in "Cato" a play written in 1712) Those who love and admire Jesus but who are not ready to choose him above all others are stuck on the other side of the river and that is not a safe place to be.

13. In the Book of Romans, we are warned about the consequences of stepping back from the river of decision. Three times in Romans 1, God is said to have "given them over" to their own destruction. Note: God is not destroying them. Their decisions are destroying them and God is not going to save them from the consequences of their free choices. [Romans 1:21-24, 26, 28]
14. Back to Hebrews 4 and we see that Today has been set for our decision to enter His rest...and I think it is time to define what that means.
15. Back in the days of the people who stood there, the graves of their parents behind them, the Promised Land ahead of them, a river in between...God promises to give them the land, and He does, but they have to fight for every inch of it. It makes me remember the prayer Jesus gave us "Give us our daily bread" – but it won't float through the window. By "giving" the land to us, He is promising that we will win the war. We will not win every battle and we will not make it through this world unscarred, but we will be victorious when it is all said and done.
16. So the "rest" here is not heaven: it is resting from our decisions. Every day, we have a myriad of decisions to make. Those who elevate Jesus as Lord and follow him are free from many of those decisions because we have made our decision (and, as the Jews found out long ago, no decision IS a decision). When we choose one to marry, we are deciding against all other options. When we moved to TN, we were making a choice against all other options.
17. There is rest in knowing that the decision has been made (our relief when Duncan married Megan). This is rest in our souls. [Matthew 11:28-30] This meaning would have been plain to the Jews for their knew their songbook, their prayer book, that collection we call the Book of Psalms. [Psalm 92:12-15]

18. The Lord is our rock. We need no other. Jesus is our Lord, we need no other. We will not join the religious chorus of the ages that tells us we need Jesus AND anything else – precision worship, perfect doctrine, etc. We will not fall for the fallacy that it matters to God more what we believe about Him than how we live for Him.
19. We will let the story of Jesus carry us forward. [Hebrews 4:12-13] This is not referring to the Bible as that hadn't been collected yet. It is not exactly referring to Jesus, as in John 1, but that is closer to his point. It is referring to the stories of Jesus, the teaching and example of Jesus for that is all we need, now and forever.
20. As a man who lives with the Gospels I can tell you that no one goes there (even Red Letter Christians) in order to escape religious obligation. Some have made that charge but I fear that reveals their ignorance of the Gospels. Jesus' teachings will never leave us where we are. As Max Lucado famously said years ago: God loves you far too much to leave you like you are right now."

Will you let Jesus change you? Will you shut down the noisy world and your noisy mind and decide to cross the river and enter into His rest? The maudlin old hymn "Almost Persuaded" haunted me as a child. I much prefer "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."