

Don't Miss This Vacation! Hebrews 4:1-13

After being gone on vacation the past 2 Sundays it's good to be back. My family and I had a restful time away. How many of you look forward to going on a vacation or a time away from your normal routine to do something out of the ordinary? Name some vacations or places that you would be excited about... How many would love to just be on permanent vacation? Let me ask you this, has anyone ever experienced something that came up that prevented you from going on your expected vacation and time of rest? How did that feel? Well this morning God's word is going to plead with us and advise us as to how *not* to miss the best vacation and time of rest that God is planning for mankind.

As has been stated before, the writer of Hebrews is appealing to the Jewish people at large, and has been using the Old Testament as the means to point to the supremacy of Jesus. In chapter 3, a passage from Psalm 95 was quoted, referencing the time when God's people, back in the book of Numbers (14:20-24), were not allowed to enter into the promised land of rest after Moses and Aaron led the miraculous escape from Egypt. You see, after the 10 plagues, and then walking away through the parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites then spent 2 years basically in God's "boot camp." In that 2 years they received God's law and instructions for following Him, they built the tabernacle, and were learning how to trust and live in community with the Creator God of the Universe. And at the end of this 2 year period, God led them to the land then known as the land of Canaan, that would later become the nation of Israel.

Now keep in mind, for this whole two years, the people had been living off the premise that God was rescuing them from slavery in Egypt in order that they would be given a place of their own, where they could worship God freely, pursuing life, liberty, and happiness, and rest from all the trouble they had been experiencing in Egypt for the past 400 some years. During the two year boot camp that was prepare them for their rest, they were trusting/believing/expressing faith that God was going to bring them to this place of rest- a place where they could relax and wouldn't be so heavily burdened, worked, stressed, taken advantage of.

At the end of that 2 years, surveyors were sent out to take a look at the land and report back to the people, and the surveyors reported on how rich the land was in resources and crops- it was everything God had promised, but- there was another people group living there, one who was very evil, and who were described as being giants. And Numbers chapter 14 states that upon hearing the surveyors' report, all the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and started to lose their faith in God. The people started to *not* believe that God would do as He had been promising. They raised their voices and declared they wanted a new leader and that they wanted to return to Egypt. They rejected God and God's plans of rest for them. And Moses and Aaron were shocked. Two of the surveyors- Joshua and Caleb- attempted to change the hearts of the people- they attempted to encourage the people's faith in God; they tried to reassure the people

that God could be still be trusted; they begged the people not to rebel against the Lord in this way. But the people didn't listen. In response to what Joshua and Caleb said, the people of Israel picked up stones so that they could kill Joshua and Caleb. But before they could do so, God descended in glorious form at the tabernacle and had a conversation with Moses, and together they discussed what should be done. And the result of that conversation, was that the surveyors who didn't remain trusting in the Lord died of a plague, and God stated the punishment for the people's unbelief would be that they would *not* enter that place of rest that He had promised to them. Rather God would let them live out the rest of their days in the wilderness for 40 years, until *everyone* in that generation died (with exception to Joshua and Caleb), and then at the end of that 40 years, Joshua and Caleb and the people's descendants- their sons and daughters- would then enter the land. And so it's *that* event, that Psalms 95 is referring to, and that Hebrews chapter 3 and 4 are now referring to. And the author is warning against *that* type of unbelief to the reader, it is that type of unbelief that will cause you to miss the ultimate promised-land-rest-eternal-heavenly-kingdom-vacation-that-you-don't-have-to-come-back-from, that is one day coming. Verse 12 of chapter 3 warns, saying to "take care" not to have this type of, as it says, "*unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.*" In our passage today, the language ramps up a bit, so as to double down on making sure no one misses this ultimate vacation God has planned for us. **verse 1 of chapter 4...**

It should cause fear, we should be terrified- to think that anyone who has listened to, read, understood the promises of God- might miss the promised land of rest that is coming. The author is now not talking about the physical promised land of Israel, but rather is drawing the connection that Heaven, the Kingdom of God, Eternal life- is the greater "place of rest" that we can now, like the Israelites back in Numbers- can miss out on. We, like the Israelites in Numbers, are functioning in life, to a degree, like slaves. There is injustice, we work super hard to get by, governments are unfair, we live life tired and worn out, people are mistreated. And throughout the Bible, God has promised that He has a better place of true peaceful rest and freedom in mind for those of us who will put our trust in Him. A place of rich abundance and provision, where there is no more sadness, where the leadership, government, and people are good, fair, and just- a place free of worry and free of anxiety, a place where everything is provided for.

Our recent vacation consisted of going on a cruise ship. And what's so great about a cruise, is that not only are you unable to use WiFi and cell phones, right- you're forced to unwind from the entanglements of technology, but in addition to that- everything is provided for you. Food, travel, entertainment, you don't have to plan or worry about a thing- it's all taken care of. I'm like: "*Yes, after swimming with the tropical fish on a paradise beach, before I go to the amazing musical production, yes I think I will have both the prime rib steak and the almond crusted salmon, please.*" And there's literally people from all over the world, all from different countries, cultures, and languages- all united

together in happiness, enjoyment, peace, and rest- because everything has been taken care of. All the people in charge- the ship staff- are all unbelievably gracious, friendly, helpful, joyful. And yet this experience pales in comparison to the Kingdom place of rest that is promised over and over in the Bible for those who place their hope/trust/faith/belief in Jesus. You don't even have to worry about the possibility of getting sea sick in the vacation He has planned. The whole Bible cries out- "There is amazing, never-ending joy and rest coming, this is the life you were intended to live, this is what is offered- so *don't* miss it!" And the next few verses reveal how one might miss the coming promised rest. **(v 2-3)**

It *might* be argued that people during the Old Testament time and people of the New Testament time (and after) have two different paradigms concerning forgiveness, salvation, and their relationship with God- but the reality is, God didn't really change, His requirements aren't really that different- what God requires of mankind, no matter what side of history you are on- is faith, belief, trust in Him. He called the Israelites to trust His plan to bring them into the promised land of rest just like He calls us to trust His plan through Jesus to bring us into the coming Kingdom land of rest. It says here the people back in Numbers missed out on the rest because they didn't have *faith* like Joshua and Caleb. They didn't have faith that what God said was true, they didn't believe Him, they stopped trusting in Him. They refused to believe He would deliver on what He promised, they snubbed their noses at the idea God would provide for them, they had serious doubts that God would take care of the bad guys who were in the land. And just like it was then, it is now: *only those who have believed God* (specifically as revealed through Jesus) will enter the greater, true rest, the vacation that will be so much better even than the agriculturally rich environment of Canaan. Only those who continue in belief that God will deliver what He promised, only those who continue to trust that God will provide, only those who rest in knowing God will take care of the badness- will be able to enter into His Heavenly rest. This is what God wants for you- for you to enter into true rest, peace, joy- but the only way to get there is through sustained faith in Him.

Now God, nor the author of Hebrews want you to fear losing your salvation, or to fear the bad things in this world, or to fear the future, or death, or demons- no there are plenty of scriptures telling us *not* to fear any of those things. But the thing we *are* told to fear- is *unbelief*. We are told to fear *faithlessness*. The one thing we should be terrified of is *not trusting God*. If you don't believe what the scriptures say, if you don't place your faith in this Jesus-God, if you don't trust Him as the only one who can fix your life and this mess of the world- then you have everything in this world to be afraid of. Those who have a knowledge of religion and even teach it, without truly believing it- have everything to fear. Those who expect to be saved by their own works- have everything to fear. Those who delay getting their relationship right with Jesus- have everything to fear. The only way to live *without* fear, is to fear your own unbelief so much that you take steps to

make sure that you will not live in unbelief.

It's often said that we as humans are creatures of habit. What are some habits that we do- can you name some for me? Since we as humans are creatures of habit, it's probably easy to fall into a habit of unbelief, distrust, and skepticism of God. So one thing that can be done to combat that tendency, is to create habits that tend to enrich our belief, faith, trust in God. Daily, weekly, monthly, yearly routines, that ground us and re-center us back in our faith- reminding us that God is good, we can trust Him, Jesus is our hope and salvation. We read and re-read His word, we regularly rub shoulders with other believers, we humbly pray alone and with others, we sing together, we talk together about things we don't understand, we re-claim yearly holidays as times to remind us of God's loving plan. God takes this idea of continued belief in Him seriously, so we should too, and thus set up life habits that promote sustained trust in Him.

Now, in the following verses, an argument is presented aimed at those who perhaps might not yet be persuaded that a future Heavenly rest even exists. Verse 4... (v 4-7)

This passage is perhaps a little hard to follow, but let's attempt to walk through the thought process. The author begins the argument by saying somewhere in scripture it says "*God rested on the seventh day from all His works.*" I think he is throwing in a humorous/maybe slightly mocking jab at those who (like the Sadducees for example) didn't believe in the afterlife. He says "somewhere" it's recorded... knowing very well that every single Hebrew reader would know the quoted verse is from the well-known book of Genesis... that *there* it says God entered a rest. And it's not a "rest" like as in God was tired and never did anything else again, but it's more like the rest that results from the completion of a work. And then in verse 5 God is recorded as saying "They certainly shall not enter my rest." (referring again back to the quoted passage in chapter 3, which is a quote from Psalm 95, which references Numbers 14), speaking of those Israelites who chose not to believe God, who did not enter the land of Canaan, and I would argue that they did not enter into God's eternal rest either after they passed from this life *unless* they changed their faith-heart condition towards God during that 40 years. What the author is stating is that after creation, God entered a Heavenly rest that was available for others to enter into as well, as to join in with Him in that same kind of accomplishment and rest. Entrance into that rest is granted through belief/trust/faith in Him, *denial* of entrance into that rest is a result of *not* believing/trusting/having faith in Him. Then verse 6 says that that rest is still available, the door is still open to join in with God in that Sabbath-day-like rest even though there have been those before who heard how to enter it who did *not* enter because of disobedience. Again, that disobedience has already been expressed as unbelief/lack of faith/absence of trust in God. Verse 7, David wrote in Psalm 95 that *today* you can walk through that door and receive the promised rest- *if* you don't harden your heart and *if* you remain in belief/faith/trust. Here's the

connection the author is attempting to make- in Genesis from the very beginning- God says He lives in the Heavenly awesomely cool rest zone, years later in Numbers the people had opportunity to join Him in that awesomely cool rest zone if they remained in a state of belief in Him by trusting Him with the metaphorical rest zone of the land of Canaan, and then even many years after that King David says to the people, as per Psalm 95 *“come before His presence (enter into the rest place where He is)... Come, let’s worship and bow down, Let’s kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice... don’t harden your heart and fall into unbelief/faithlessness/anti-trust.”* King David resided in the land of Canaan, his ancestors entered into the promised land and took hold of it, yet even he proclaims that there is still a rest to enter in to. Right? After that 40 years, Joshua, Caleb, and all the other sons and daughters from the tribes of Israel entered into the promised land, and then years later King David calls out from that very land to people already all there saying *today* you can still enter into the real promised land of God’s presence. There is still a land to pursue through sustained faith in the Lord. And yes, some of that rest is experienced in the here and now, attempting to enter into the Lord’s presence through worship and prayer with hearts humbled and aligned with Him, and attempting to live life in a state of peace and rest in right relationship with Jesus- but the full experience of entering His presence is still to come. There is still a coming “sabbath” rest for those who remain in belief- where the daily grind ends and enjoyment begins. There is still a day of rest coming that God is referring to other than the day the Israelites entered into Israel. This is the point emphasized in the following verses... **(v 8-10)**

The author speaks of the coming Kingdom of Heaven, the eternal Kingdom spoken of by Jesus- it’s compared to the Sabbath day rest. Again, in Genesis we are told that God rested on the last day of the week, on the 7th day, after His completion of creation in 6 days, and then in the ten commandments- given to the people by God during their time in the wilderness- the people were commanded to take a sabbath day rest from their work. For 6 days straight the people were to work, collect food, do ordinary chores, but on the last day of the week, the Sabbath day, everyone was to rest. And the idea was to have a special focus on God- remembering that He created all and then entered into a rest, but it was also this idea of trusting Him (believing/having faith) that He would provide and take care of His people who honor Him. The sabbath day of rest was commanded as a sort of test of faith to determine those who really believed what God said, and who didn’t. God told the people in the wilderness that He would provide enough for them through the week so that they would have enough to not have to work on the Sabbath. It was so important for God’s people to trust Him with this, that in Numbers 15 there is recorded a story about a man doing work on the Sabbath day and God punishing him with death. And I think it’s so serious not merely because we as humans need a rest day in order to be healthy and function better the rest of the week,

but it's so serious because the Sabbath day represents more than just 1 day set aside during the week to not work. It represents and points toward the idea of the eternal Kingdom of Heaven "Sabbath" where we will finally one day have true rest and true face to face fellowship with God. And the only way we are able to get to that place of Heavenly rest, is by trusting God with the time period that comes before that Heavenly rest. Working on the weekly Sabbath equates to misrepresenting the eternal Sabbath that is coming. Working on the Sabbath means you are not participating in the rest that the Sabbath offers, and the only alternative for those *not* experiencing the coming eternal Sabbath is eternal death. When the eternal Sabbath Kingdom comes, the only ones who won't participate in it will be the ones who die in the Lake of Fire.

So, I don't know if anyone needs to hear this or not, but working non-stop without a day off is *not* something to be proud of. In American culture, we often form a sense of pride that we are so valuable and so needed- we form a sense of self-worth defined by how busy we are or by how much we work. If you walk around proudly telling people you haven't had a day off in ages, you might as well be telling people you're proud about breaking some of the other 10 commandments- like you're proud about stealing, proud of the golden image in your living room, or that you're proud of sleeping with your neighbor's spouse. The 10 commandments are to be taken seriously, and honoring the Lord with a Sabbath day rest is one of them.

I think we can also be prone to fail this commandment in the opposite way, by *not* being diligent to *work* 6 days a week. Perhaps we can break this command by being too lazy in life as well. Now, in order to not break the Sabbath command in this way, *perhaps* that means for *some* pursuing steady employment, but at the very least the basic principle is that we all are to be using what God has given us- diligently putting whatever gifts, talents, abilities God has given us to use throughout the week- whether that means working inside or outside the home, or learning, or building, or growing, or pouring into, nurturing, giving, etc. And then one day a week, we do our best to rest from the usual routine day to day life activities, and enjoy a Sabbath day through restful, energizing, focus-renewing activities.

What the Sabbath traditionally looked like for Jewish families was that sundown Friday night began the celebrated time of rest from work- and that's what it often was- a time of celebration over a meal with family and friends, hanging out and talking, games, fun, entertainment, sleeping in Saturday morning, easy leftovers for food on Saturday, a Saturday nap, playing in the creek, having family/community time, etc, and then the work week began again on Sunday morning. And it appears in scripture that New Testament followers of Jesus often regularly meet together on Sunday the first day of the week to start the week off right, *and* celebrate the day He rose from the dead- seemingly expanding the Sabbath celebration of restful fellowship a bit into Sunday.

Now, I hope I have built enough of a case for anyone who is not taking a Sabbath

day of rest to now consider taking one, but the main thrust of today's passage is not to make sure you're taking a Sabbath day of rest, but rather the thrust is that you don't won't to miss out on the ultimate Sabbath "Day" of rest that is coming in Jesus' Kingdom. Look what it says next in **verse 11...**

It says make *EVERY* effort to not miss out on the rest that is to come! But don't be confused into thinking salvation is earned by your behavior. Salvation is granted solely on the basis of your trust/belief/faith in God's plan. Jesus' life, death, resurrection is God's plan- following Jesus is God's plan- and so the only way you can miss out on entering God's rest is by disregarding that plan, refusing to believe Him, being resistant to His ways- as was the case with the Israelites there at the entry point of rest 2 years into their rescue from Egypt. Make every effort to continue in belief. Make every effort to continue in trust. Make every effort to continue in faith with Jesus.

This understanding of salvation might be a little unnerving for some. It's a little nebulous to describe salvation in terms of a state of continued belief/faith/trust- right? Don't we prefer the idea of: I prayed a prayer, I got baptized- I'm good right? But God is not calling us to pray a single prayer- to just merely pay lip service to Him on occasion, he's not calling us to jump through hoops, or follow formulated steps that we can check off and then go about as we please. The end goal is that we will live in a state of peaceful rest in intimate relationship with Him in His eternal Kingdom, and the way we get there is by already putting in to practice that state of relationship with Him. If someone doesn't really want that state of relationship with God in *this* life, why would He give them that state of relationship for eternity? God is too morally good to treat someone like that- He's not going to force anyone against their will to live in community with Him. And the reality is, only God can see the true intentions of one's heart- only He can see if a close relationship with Him is what someone really desires. A life of continued belief/faith/trust in Him might be a little difficult to describe as a formula, but God's word is the precise tool needed to define whether someone is living that life of continued belief/faith/trust in Him. Look at **verses 12 and 13** with me...

God's word is the standard by which we must compare our lives to. It's the tool that can distinguish between real and fake, faith and faithless. God's word is what will properly judge our deepest heart motives and subconscious decisions. It's living- not old and stale, it's active and moving- not dead and stationary. It cuts and precisely draws the line between belief and unbelief, it reaches past the physical into the spiritual realm of soul and spirit. God's word will determine whose heart belongs to Him and whose heart is merely faking it. And no one can hide from what He will expose. No one can fool Him, no one can trick Him, no one can convince Him with pretending. No, He sees and knows all- nothing escapes His vision and knowledge- He sees and knows us better than we see and know ourselves. And so the plea from this passage is, do all that is possible to be real before Him- striving to believe, and trust, and hold to faith in Him alone- not placing trust

in money, success, achievements, personal goodness; not placing hope in governments, elections, leaders, churches; not trusting in our own wisdom, past experiences, or knowledge- but placing full belief in the right now on God revealed through Jesus Christ and through scripture.