

DEREK PRINCE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Analysis of Hebrews: Chapter 4



Part 6/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

We're commencing this session at the beginning of Hebrews 4. This is in the middle of one of the warning passages that I pointed out to you, the longest of all of them. It began in Hebrews 3:7 and it continues through to chapter 4, verse 13. The warning is against unbelief. We will not go over all the material that we covered last time but let me just read to you the last three verses of chapter 3 so that we're in gear and moving.

> "For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?"

And I pointed out to you last time that that word also means "refuse to believe." It combines both the concept of unbelief and disobedience.

> "And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

That's the closing line of chapter 3. They were not able to enter because of unbelief. We need to then move into chapter 4 and note the first word, which is a therefore.

> "Therefore, let us fear ..."

What does the "therefore" imply? It implies that we could possibly make the same tragic error that they made, which would be what? Failing to enter God's appointed rest through unbelief. I don't believe that we really give sufficient attention to the danger of unbelief, just as I also believe we don't lay sufficient emphasis on the necessity of faith. I am really desirous to move on in the things of God and to lead people on in the things of God but sometimes we move on so fast that we get away from the things that really matter to start with. I never feel that I can ignore the importance of faith in my own life. I'm always conscious of

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the importance of faith and I'm always aware of the danger of unbelief. So this verse and this passage really speak to me.

Now I'm going on translating from the Greek, pausing to make comments as necessary. First of all, I pointed out in outline that this is the first of twelve passages where the writer says "let us." Actually, there are four of them in this chapter. The first one is the opening words. "Therefore, let us fear." Would that surprise you or offend you? Would you feel that that's out of place? Christians have no room for fear.

I went through a rather tragic experience with that. The people who as far as anybody was humanly responsible for my coming to the Lord, were a fine Christian couple in a town in Yorkshire, England. I was only with them for a few weeks and then the British Army sent me overseas. When I went back to England in 1948–49, I went and visited them. I discovered that in some respects they were not doing well spiritually—particularly the man who was in some ways my father in the faith. He had this teaching which I think he came to by himself that there was no room left for fear in the Christian life. It was difficult for me to argue with him, because he was much my senior and I had real respect and love for him. I said, "That depends on what kind of fear you're talking about, because in Psalm 19 it says, 'The fear of the LORD is clean and endureth forever.' So, there's never an end to that kind of fear." The sad thing was he took a stand about never using medicine and it was in a way somewhat arrogant. I linked it with this attitude of his there's no more room for fear of any kind. Tragically, he developed diabetes and had to have his leg amputated. He could hardly get over the shock that his faith hadn't brought him healing.

In my observation, the real problem was that he didn't understand that there is a kind of fear which is very much in place in the Christian life. These words here are not addressed to unbelievers; they're addressed to Christian believers. "Let us fear." Let us bear in mind there's always a possibility of not getting in to what God has appointed for us.

This is also the first occurrence in this verse of the word that we're tracing through, promise.

> "Therefore, let us fear lest, there being left to us a promise to enter into His rest [that's God's rest], any of you should seem to have come short of it."

A promise is two sided. It offers you good but on the other hand, if you fail to claim the promise, you're deprived of something. I think that's how it is with so much in the Christian life. The good is available but with the offer of the good there's always the possibility of missing it. So for me this is a very important verse. I don't ever want to progress beyond this. I want to walk in that fear that keeps me very sober and humble. There's no room for arrogance, for pride, for self-confidence. I think you'll find that this is one of the main lessons of this chapter. The main theme of the chapter, the practical application is entering into God's rest. But, I Believe we have to come with this attitude if we're going to be able to enter into God's rest.

Let's go on to the second verse.

> "For we also have been evangelized [we've had good news proclaimed to us. It's one single verb in Greek, to evangelize.] just as they did too; but the word of hearing ..."

Literally you can translate it "the word they heard" but it is a word of hearing. I don't know whether you can see what I'm trying to get at. It's a word to be heard.

> "... the word of hearing did not help them [or profit them], because it was not mixed with faith in those who heard it."

Again, there's an important application. God's Word is sent to do us good, but it only benefits us if it's mixed with faith enough to hear it. Faith is the catalyst that releases the beneficial effects of the Word of God.

Turn for a moment, if you wish, to 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

> "And for this reason we also thank God continually [this is addressed to the Thessalonian Christians] because when you received the word of hearing ..."

It's exactly the same phrase, "the word of hearing"—the word that was designed to be heard.

> "... from us the word of God, you received it not as a word of man, but as it truly is, a word of God, which also works effectively in you who believe it."

So the condition for the Word of God working in us effectively, doing what it's supposed to do, is that we believe it. If it is not mixed with faith in us, it does not produce the results that are promised.

And faith, in turn, comes by hearing, as we saw last week, I believe. So that, in a sense, hearing is the essence of what's required of us. Going back to verses 3–5 of chapter 4:

> "For we who have believed do enter into the rest ..."

Or "are entering into the rest." You can translate it either way. Maybe for some one is true and for some the other is true. We who believed do enter into rest or are entering into rest.

> "... as He said ..."

And we get now a quotation once more from Psalm 95, which is quoted about five or six times in this passage.

> "As I swore in My wrath, they shall never enter into My rest."

Now the emphasis here is on "My rest," God's rest.

> "... although the works [God's works] were finished from the foundation of the world. For He said somewhere ..."

And I notice the writer of Hebrews doesn't always give the exact reference. Have you noticed that?

He said "somewhere." Once or twice he does that.

> "He said somewhere concerning the seventh day as follows, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'; and here again, 'They shall never enter into My rest.'"

Let's analyze that a little. "We who believed enter into rest." Believing is past tense, entering is present tense. So, before you can enter, you must have believed. Believing must be a settled decision. You don't keep going back and doing it again; it's something you've done. You've made the decision, you've made the commitment. On the basis of that, you can proceed to enter into rest. The people who are always having to go back and do their believing again really don't qualify to enter into the rest. "We who believed, or have believed, do enter into rest."

And it's God's rest that is being spoken about. One of the things about God is that He likes to share His good things with us. In one of the psalms it says that "He makes us to drink of the river of His pleasures." So God shares His pleasures with us. One of the pleasures that He wants to share is His rest. He wants us to enter into the rest that He entered into.

Now, in order to follow up this theme of rest, let's turn to the Old Testament for a moment. Genesis 2:2:

> "And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done."

So God's rest is a ceasing from all the work He did. I'm sure there are aspects of this that I don't fully understand, but I don't believe that God rested precisely because He was tired. His rest was not the result of weariness. It was one of His pleasures. I would almost like to say He relaxed. If I could use the phrase, He sat back and looked at everything He'd made and took time to enjoy it. How many of us ever take time to enjoy the things we do or have done? It's good for those that do, but it's not a conspicuous feature of American life. Most Americans today in our culture, by the time they've done something are busy starting the next thing. The pattern of God is when you've done something, enjoy it. Take time to enjoy it.

If you've brought up a family, take time to enjoy them. Whatever it may be you've done, it's godly to enjoy it, to relax. In fact, the ability to relax is a divine ability.

Now, I want to follow that theme up in Exodus 20, which is where we are first given the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:8–11 is the fourth commandment. It's interesting that far more space is given to the fourth commandment than to any of the others.

> "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy ..."

Incidentally, the word Sabbath, Hebrew: shabbat. It's directly related to the word for "rest," which is also ? shavat?. Let's not bother about the middle letter. So, "rest" and "Sabbath" are actually from the same root. So God took a Sabbath on the seventh day; He rested.

> "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy ..."

Ruth and I always enjoy the Sabbath in Israel. One of the things you do when you meet somebody or you take your farewell from somebody and say, Friday lunch time, the Sabbath will begin at sunset Friday. You say, "Shabbat shalom"—"Sabbath peace to you." It really is a blessing to say that. In fact, Ruth and I when we get to Friday here in Florida we turn to one another and say, "Shabbat shalom." It's something for which English-speaking Christians really don't have anything.

So, let's look at this:

> "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work [that's also a command], but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; on it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

A dear rabbi, who's a friend of mine, pointed out to me that God blessed time and sanctified that before He blessed space. Time was the first thing God sanctified. And there is a rather beautiful book written by an older rabbi that says "the Sabbath is God's cathedral in time." It's His place of worship and rest and holiness.

So Israel were commanded to keep the Sabbath because God kept the Sabbath. In Deuteronomy where the Ten Commandments are repeated, another reason is given: because they had been slaves in Egypt and God had delivered them. So it was also a commemoration of their release from slavery, of their ability to take rest. Then another very significant passage, I believe, in Exodus 31:16–17:

> "So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate [to do] the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant."

That's an interesting point which we really don't have time to go into. In fact, I'm not sure I'm really competent to go into it, but God said, "As far as Israel is concerned, that's a perpetual covenant." Verse 17:

> "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."

That was spoken probably something like 3,500 years ago and, as far as the Jewish people as a whole are concerned, it's been true ever since. They have kept the seventh day holy for 3,500 years. That's a pretty good record.

One of the things it's done is keep them a separate people, because if you actually really observe that seventh day—not Sunday, but the seventh day—you'll be different from most of the people round about you.

Secondly, it's a perpetual sign that they're the Lord's people. The people who keep the Sabbath are the Lord's people.

Now, I don't believe as Christians we are expected—or required, let me say—to observe the Sabbath in precisely that way. But, I want to suggest to you that to be able to rest is a mark of God's people. Those who haven't entered into rest don't really carry the token that they're the people of God. I think this theme of rest is far more important than most of us have made room for in our thinking. As a matter of fact, God has been dealing with me since I prepared this study. As a result of preparing this study my whole attitude has undergone certain very important adjustments.

Now we'll go on in Hebrews 4 with the 6th verse.

> "Since therefore it remains for some to enter into it [that's God's rest], and those who previously had the good news presented did not enter in through [what?] disobedience [unbelief]."

I've explained there the Greek word. I'd like you to look in the outline if you can. It means literally "not allowing oneself to be persuaded." So it's refusing or withholding belief. This centers in the will, not in the intellect. The problem with this

kind of unbelief is not in the mind, it's in the will. It's a refusal to give consent. Hence, it is the primary sin. Keep your finger in Hebrews and turn to John 16 just for a moment. John 16:8–9, Jesus is speaking to His disciples about the coming of the comforter, the Holy Spirit and He speaks about what He will do when He comes.

> "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgment ..."

Those are the three basic issues of all true religion: sin, righteousness, judgment. The human mind, especially today in our culture, does not like that word judgment. But it's one of the three basic issues that build up true religion. There's sin, there's righteousness and there's judgment according to sin or righteousness. Verse 9:

> "... concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me ..."

Notice that's the primary sin that the Holy Spirit convicts of —that's unbelief. It's rather amazing how He does it. I remember years back when I was teaching the Bible to my students in East Africa, to my African students, I felt prompted to speak on faith. I preached what I trusted was a positive message on faith. One of my women students, a young woman of about 20 broke down and started sobbing. I was really surprised, I didn't understand what had upset her. But when I began to deal with her privately, I discovered that the Holy Spirit had convicted her of unbelief. His conviction was so powerful that she was just actually broken down with it. It was a little demonstration to me of what the Holy Spirit can do when He gets our attention. She was a professing Christian.

Going back to Hebrews 4:7–9, but we'll probably have to go back to verse 6. I hope you can follow this, it's a little involved. But that's not my fault, I didn't write it.

> "Since therefore it remains for some to enter into God's rest, and those who previously had the good news presented to them did not enter in through disobedience [unbelief], and again He sets aside [or He defines or specifies] a day, saying, 'Today,' through David after such a long time ..."

Well, David was probably four or five hundred years after the time when God spoke these words to the Israelites in the desert. But David, again in the psalm, brings up this issue of entering into God's rest. In other words, the Israelites to whom it was first presented did not accept, they did not enter in. God didn't give up because hundreds of years later by the Holy Spirit through David in the book of Psalms he raises again the issue of entering into God's rest. He says:

> "Today ..."

And as I say, that was hundreds of years after the Israelites were in the wilderness:

> "... if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

My comment on that (which is in your outline) is, Man's failure and Satan's activity can delay the outworking of God's purpose but never ultimately thwart it. I think that's important. Israel didn't enter in in the wilderness but that didn't mean that God gave up and said, "Nobody will enter in." He just waited for another group of people at another time. I like the Scripture there in Job 42:2. Keep your finger in Hebrews, I don't need to tell you that. Job 42:2. This to me is a great comfort. We'll read verse 1.

> "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, [and it took him 41 chapters to discover this!] 'I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted.'"

Do you know that? Do you realize no purpose of God can be thwarted? It may be delayed, but Satan cannot ultimately thwart God's purpose. That's a great comfort to me personally because I believe it's true in my life. I may have problems, there may be opposition, but ultimately God's purpose in my life cannot be thwarted. That's good news. We need to be convinced of that.

So it was with Israel. They failed, but God said, "There are still going to be people that will enter into My rest. I'm not giving up."

Going back to Hebrews 4:8.

> "For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not be speaking about another day after all that."

So the writer points out that though the words were spoken first to Moses and to Joshua, they did not bring God's people into rest. My comment again, the generation under Moses never entered the Promised Land at all. The generation under Joshua entered the land, but did not fully obey the Lord's commands and so did not enjoy full possession or permanent rest. There's a lengthy quotation there from Joshua 23, we will not turn to it and read it because I need to move on. But the essence of it was: Now you're in the land. If you obey Me and above all, if you will not have any kind of relationship or dealing with the Canaanites but if you will separate yourself totally from them, then you'll be My people." But we know historically Israel failed to meet that condition so they did not have full possession of the land or permanent rest.

There's a lesson. The lesson is twofold. First of all, outside your inheritance, as I said last time, you cannot rest. The rest is only in the inheritance. But, on the other hand, you can be in the inheritance and still not rest if you get involved with the Canaanites. So, there's a double warning.

Going on, chapter 4, verse 10—the latter part of verse 9:

> "There remains therefore a keeping of the sabbath for the people of God."

The Greek word, in case you're interested is ?sabatismal?, which means precisely "an observing of the Sabbath." Most of the translations say "a sabbath rest for the people of God," but the emphasis is on the Sabbath character of the rest. Verse 10:

> "For the one who has entered into His rest [that's God's rest] has also himself rested from his own work, as God did from His."

So we have the pattern of God. God worked for six days, the seventh day He took a Sabbath. Taking the Sabbath, He ceased from His work. We enter into rest the same way that God did. How? By ceasing from our own work. That's the key.

I'm going to devote the latter part of this study to the conditions for entering into rest so I'm going to move on to the end of the chapter, then go back and give a practical application. I want to emphasize that: the key to entering into God's rest is doing what God did, which is ceasing from our own works.

Let me amplify this, although we'll come back to it. In my outline the key to entering rest is resting from our own works and that covers two aspects. First of all, no longer doing our own will. Secondly, no longer doing God's will in our own strength. And primarily, this is a decision. If you haven't taken the decision, I question whether you are in the rest.

Going on in verse 11:

> "Let us [and this is the second 'let us' passage] ... Let us therefore be zealous [or diligent] ..."

And the other version says, "Let us make a real effort." I prefer that, because it brings out the fact that to get into rest you have to make an effort. Okay? There's a deliberate paradox.

> "Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, that nobody may fall through the same example of disobedience [or unbelief]."

Again, what's the warning? Unbelief.

I don't know how many of you are in any way familiar with Jewish neighbors or friends, but one of the busiest periods in any Jewish home is Friday—especially for the Jewish housemothers. She has to get everything ready before the sun sets. She has to get the children washed clean, dressed, the table set, the food cooked, everything. So, the busiest period is just before the Sabbath. And I think the writer says we've got to be equally diligent to make sure that we're ready to enter into our rest. Verse 12. Now we get a slightly different approach or theme here and we get a "for." I'll translate it, and then we'll go back and examine it.

> "For the word of God is living and active ..."

The Greek word is the word that gives us energetic in English.

> "... and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrates to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and the marrow, and is a judge [or a discerner] of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature that is invisible before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

You must say, that's a very solemn passage. I am continually amazed at the severity of these words. As I begin to teach them I'm amazed at the way in which I feel the Holy Spirit kind of transmitting that severity through me.

Let's look at a few of the implications. Why does it say, "For the word of God is living"? What's the reason? When it is said, "Let us therefore be diligent [or make every effort] for the word of God is living," what's the connection? Well, I think I'm going to read from my outline which I think says it as well as I can. God's word penetrates to every area of our being, spiritual and physical. If we regularly expose ourselves to it, it will lay bare any undetected areas of unbelief or disobedience. So, don't judge yourself. Don't say, "I'm okay; I've nothing to worry about." Expose yourself to the word of God. Let it judge your thoughts and intentions. Open your whole life to it.

Then it says there in the 13th verse, "Everything is naked and bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Bear in mind, with whom do we have to do? Is it the pastor, or your shepherd? With whom do we have to do? God, that's right. I have met countless Christians whose whole conduct told me that they were convinced if they could fool me, nobody would know. And I really prayed, "God, show them that it isn't really me they have to deal with. It's You." It's very, very easy to get to that attitude where if I can fool people, I've got by.

There's an amazing word there which I carefully investigated in the dictionary. "All things are laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Apparently, it's a metaphor from one or other of two things. Either wrestling, where the wrestler gets his hand under the other man's chin and pushes his chin back till his throat is exposed and then chops him on the throat, or from killing something like a chicken where you take the chicken's throat and expose it so that you can cut it with the knife. In other words, God's word exposes our throat. It's such a vivid metaphor. It's like you're trying to argue with God but He's a smarter wrestler than you are, in His word. And He gets you to the point where you're just exposed.

Or, take the example of the chicken. The knife is right at your throat, what are you going to say next? "I didn't do it, Lord." Well, the knife is right there.

I don't know whether you can see it but it is so vivid.

So, let me give you my two quotes there. Consider the following. While you are reading your Bible, your Bible is also reading you. Did you discover that? I discovered that when I wasn't even a believer and started to read the Bible as a philosopher. After awhile, I lost the excitement of life. I would go out to dances and fall asleep before midnight. I thought, I'm getting old before my time. I wasn't even 25 at the time. The things that had excited me and thrilled me no longer really seemed to satisfy and I lost my confidence in my own intellectual ability. I thought I had the answer to every question and I really began to wonder, What's gone wrong with me? The truth was I was reading my Bible and my Bible was reading me. It was telling me, "You're not really nearly as clever as you think you are. And here and here are certain areas that prove it!"

Second, either your Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from your Bible. Basically, that is ultimately true. If you lose interest in your Bible, it's a bad symptom. Furthermore, it's going to lead to worse results. If you expose yourself to the Bible, as the writer says here, it will lay bare those secret areas of unbelief and disobedience, stubbornness.

I've been amazed by some people I've been dealing with lately—at least not in the room right now! I've been amazed at their stubbornness. I don't believe they saw it themselves at all because they hadn't exposed themselves to this penetrating word that goes right inside and divides the soulish and the spiritual.

Now we come to the first passage of practical application, verses 14–16. And the essence of the application is confident access to God. In verse 14 we have the third "let us" passage, which is "let us hold fast our confession." Let's look at this passage now beginning at verse 14.

> "Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession."

That's what it says. The confession every Christian has to make.

> "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tested [or tempted] in all things in like manner as we are, without sin. Let us therefore [that's the fourth 'let us'] approach with confidence ..."

But it's that word that means "freedom of speech." Do you remember that? In other words, don't let the devil take away your freedom of speech. Don't make the devil make you sin-conscious, guilt- conscious, timid, fearful.

> "Let us approach with boldness [with confidence that expresses itself freely in what we say] to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace for help when we need it."

All right, coming to the last one, "Having therefore a great high priest who has passed through the heavens." He's passed above all other kingdoms and powers and rulers. He's exalted far above them all. "Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession." I pointed out that, continually, confession is linked to the ministry of Jesus as High Priest. It's the way that we activate His ministry as High Priest on our behalf.

"Let us hold fast the confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who's been tempted in all points in a way like us, but without sin." Let me just point out there that Jesus can empathize with us in all our temptations. Never say to Him, "Lord, you don't understand what I'm going through." Because, He does. That's one of His qualifications to be our high priest.

Then we come to the 16th verse, "Let us therefore draw near or approach with freedom of speech to the throne of grace, in order that we may obtain mercy and find grace for help at the time we need it." It's my conviction that if God says in His word to us, "Let us draw near," and if we meet the conditions, then we will obtain what we come for. We can be sure of obtaining mercy and finding grace if we come. I believe the biggest problem with most of us is that we're slow to recognize our need of mercy and grace. But once we see our need and meet the conditions, then the result is guaranteed.

I think particularly of that phrase "in time of need" because one of the things that holds us back is: the situation is so serious, there's nothing to do. But that's the very time that God says we should come. So, right at the moment when your need is the greatest you have this invitation.

It's a throne, so it belongs to a king and the king we're coming to is not just "a" king, he's "the King of kings," He has all authority and power. And it's a throne of grace. Grace is not earned. We don't have to earn it; we have to receive it by faith. That's another tremendous stumbling block: "I don't deserve it so I can't come." But you don't have to deserve it, you have to feel your need of it and meet the condition. You cannot earn grace.

Now I want to go for the rest of our time this evening into the question of entering into rest. This is something that as I said earlier God has dealt with me very personally. What I'm sharing with you now is the outcome of God's dealings with me. This is not just theology or theory, it's based on experience and I trust it will be 100 percent practical. One of my ambitions as a teacher of the Scriptures is never to be impractical. I always desire that in some way there will be practical results out of my teaching. Sometimes they may be long term, they may not be direct but I would be disappointed if nothing happened as a result of teaching the Word of God.

So I want you to follow with me through your outline there on Page 4/3. Here are the facts and bear in mind that faith is based on facts. The order is, as you probably heard: fact, faith, feeling. Don't start with feelings, start with fact. Put your faith in the fact and let the feelings take care of themselves.

Fact number one—and you might be surprised to know that there are seven facts and the seventh fact is divided into seven sub-facts! All right. Fact number one, there is an appointed rest for us as God's people. Hebrews 4:9:

> "Then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

So God has a Sabbath rest appointed for us.

Number two, this rest lies within our inheritance. I dwelt on that at the end of my teaching session last week with examples from Deuteronomy, which you can go over again if you wish to. When God spoke to Israel about rest it was always within their inheritance. I believe the same is true for us. Outside of our inheritance there is no rest. We could look just at Hebrews 3:16–19:

> "Who when they heard provoked? Was it not all those who came out of Egypt through Moses? And with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose carcasses fell in the desert? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His rest, if it was not except to those who disobeyed [or disbelieved]? And we see that it was through unbelief that they were not able to enter."

We see there entering into their inheritance and entering into rest were tied together. I want to emphasize that's true for us. We have to discover what our inheritance is. Otherwise, we cannot enter into our rest.

Also, I pointed out that the word inheritance and the related words heir and so on, are one of the key concepts in Hebrews and that the whole epistle is directed toward the end of inheritance, rest and perfection. They go together. In the inheritance there is the possibility of rest and the possibility of perfection. Outside of the inheritance neither rest nor perfection are possible.

Third fact, our inheritance is all that becomes ours through our relationship with Jesus. Two verses there, Hebrews 3:6:

> "... whose house [or family] we are [that is, the family of Jesus Christ], if indeed we maintain our confidence and the boasting of our hope firm to the end."

So we are the family of God in Christ if we maintain our confidence and boasting to the end. Then again, in Hebrews 3:14:

> "For we have become partakers of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm to the end."

So we're the family of God, we're partakers of Christ upon the condition of holding fast. But this is our inheritance, God's family and partakers of Christ. And I pointed out last week that if we're partakers of Christ, He shares everything with us, the entire inheritance.

Fourth fact, this inheritance is guaranteed by two things. a) the death of Jesus on our behalf; b) His eternal life of intercession for us. I'd like you to look at three very beautiful Scriptures. Romans 5:10:

> "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

So first, we're reconciled through His death. Then we're saved by His life. I think in most sections of the church there is sometimes too much emphasis on the death and not sufficient emphasis on the life. I think that has been especially true, let me say, in the Catholic Church in the past. I think it's changing. But it was always a picture of Jesus on the cross; there was a failure to go beyond the cross to the resurrection. But Paul says His death reconciles, His life will save us.

Then another beautiful verse in Romans 8:34:

> "Who is the one that condemns? [Us, that is.] Christ Jesus is He who died, yea, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

So again, first it's His death, but then it's His life of endless intercession that ensures our salvation. Then Hebrews 7:25, going back to Hebrews, and we'll be back in chapter 4 in a minute.

> "Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

Where it says "forever," the alternative reading in the margin is "completely" and the King James, I think, is an unbeatable translation there, "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him." We used to say in the days when we preached out of the King James "from the guttermost to the uttermost." I think that some of you wouldn't believe it, but I used to be a street preacher for many, many years. I saw many people in the streets saved from the guttermost to the uttermost. So that's always been a very real Scripture to me: He lives forever, there's no one He can't save. There's no life He can't change.

Going back to our outline. Fact number five, the great hindrance is unbelief. I think we need to look at those Scriptures again. Hebrews 3:12:

> "Be watchful therefore, brothers, lest there should be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in turning away from the living God."

That's addressed to all of us. Be watchful lest there should be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. Verse 19 of chapter 3:

> "And we see that it was through unbelief that they could not enter."

And chapter 4:11:

> "Let us be diligent therefore to enter into that rest, lest anyone should fall by following the same example of unbelief [or disobedience]."

I believe I failed to point out at that passage—which is something real—that we need to be very careful what example we follow. One of the dangers is we follow the wrong example. I've been impressed especially by young people in contemporary culture, there's such a tremendous danger of following the wrong example. As a matter of fact, our culture has stripped us of most of our good examples, we don't have any more heroes; every hero has been debunked. All we're left with is bad examples to follow. But it really is a very important question: What example are you following?

And, another important question is, What example are you setting? The warning here is be careful that you don't follow the wrong example of unbelief. I was dealing two years ago in Israel with a young man who was studying Hebrew at the Hebrew University in the same class that I was in. He was a Christian. But the atmosphere in Israel is absolutely permeated with unbelief. It takes real determination to hold onto your faith. Ruth and I were not, for the most part, mixing with believers because we were committed to hours of study in the Hebrew University every day. With deep regret I watched this young man, who was from England, follow the wrong examples and in the course of about six weeks I just found his faith had been undermined and I was not really able to change that. The way it happened was he picked the wrong examples to follow. So, the warning is, Check whose example you're following.

I think those of us that have to deal with teenagers will agree that, especially through the media, continually they're confronted with examples that are evil and destructive. There isn't really much of a good example for them to follow. But it isn't only true of teenagers.

Going back to our outline. Sixth fact, God's offer is today, present, urgent. We'll look at two Scriptures, Hebrews 3:15:

> "Today if you will hear His voice ..."

And Hebrews 4:7:

> "Today if you will hear His voice ..."

It might pay you to go through that passage and see how many times the word today is used. I think it's four or five times. God says, "Today." Don't put it off, don't count on the future. Now is the accepted time.

The seventh fact, we come now to the seven sub-facts. The following are the main requirements for entering our rest. I trust that you can receive these in a very practical way. First one is being attentive to hear God's voice. Hebrews 3:7, we've looked at them but we'll look at them again.

> "Today if you will hear His voice ..."

Hebrews 3:15:

> "Today if you will hear His voice ..."

Hebrews 4:7:

> "Today if you will hear His voice ..."

If you don't hear that, you don't hear His voice because three times "If you will hear His voice." And then the next requirement is resting from our own works. Hebrews 4:10:

> "For the one who has entered into His [that's God's] rest himself also has rested from his own works as God did from His."

So we have to rest from our own works to enter into God's. I think that's a kind of crisis that every one of us has to come to.

The next condition or requirement is committing ourselves to do the work God has appointed for us. Rest is not laziness. Turn to a Scripture there in Ephesians 2:10 which was the favorite Scripture of my first wife Lydia and really shaped the course of her life.

> "For we are His workmanship [his masterpiece], created in Christ Jesus with a view to good works, which God prepared in advance, in order that we may walk in them."

The "good works" are prepared in advance. Once you're created in Christ Jesus, there are good works ordained for you to walk in. You do not have to improvise. What you have to do is find out what God has prepared and then walk

in it. But, we are created for good works—that's the very objective.

Going back to our outline, the next requirement is relying on God's supernatural grace and power, not on our own ability. I think these are the two hurdles that most people find difficult to get over. First of all, ceasing from our own works and then doing God's work but relying not on our own efforts. At any rate, I would say in my own observation of myself that's my biggest problem. In many cases it's not the big jobs, it's the little ones. When I come to a big job, I know I can't handle it. But when it's a fairly small one I tend to start off in my own strength, then I wonder why something went wrong.

Let's look at some examples there. First of all, I want to look at the example of Jesus in John 9:4. This is a very remarkable statement Jesus makes. It impressed me all the more because I was used to the King James translation which is different. The King James translation, if you recall, says, "I must work the work of him that sent me." But this, which is based on more accurate texts, says:

> "For we must do the works of the One who sent Me while it is day."

The emphasis there in the Greek is on the "we." They're talking about the man born blind, and Jesus says in the previous verse, "It wasn't this man who sinned, nor his parents, but we must do the works of the One who sent Me." In other words, He's saying, "Don't sit there and theorize about why this man is blind. We've got to do our job, which is what? To give him back his sight. Don't spend all the time trying to understand the problem. Come up with the solution."

That's a very powerful statement. "We must work the works of Him who sent Me." And He didn't say "I." He identified Himself with His disciples. You and I have got a job to do, let's get on with the job. But then a little further on in John 14:10, talking to His disciples about His relationship with the

Father, He says to Philip—and we won't look into the background:

> "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words which I speak to you I do not speak from Myself [they don't come from Me], but the Father dwelling in Me does His works."

So, Jesus said in John 9:4, "We must do the works of the One who sent Me," but when He comes down to analyze how it takes place, He says, "The Father dwelling in Me does His works and the words I speak to you are not My words, they're the words the Father gave Me." In other words, Jesus totally relied on the Father within Him to accomplish the task allotted to Him. He is, in a sense, the perfect pattern of not doing it in His own ability.

Then Paul also is a very striking example of the same principle. We'll look at two Scriptures in connection with Paul. First Corinthians 15:10:

> "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

It's a remarkable statement. It's almost as though the grace of God was something additional. It wasn't just that Paul had the grace of God, but that the grace of God was with him. And first of all, he says, "I worked harder than all the rest." Then he corrects himself, "It really wasn't I, I can't take the credit. But it was the grace of God that enabled me to work like that." If any credit is to be given, it's not for being able to do it. The only credit we could take would be for letting God's grace do it. But the ability is not ours.

When I was going through this, Ruth and I were on a brief vacation in December of last year and we went there extremely weary. I don't think we've ever been more weary physically, mentally, spiritually. I asked God that He would speak to us and I really expected something prophetic. But this time He spoke to us actually through this lesson that I'm sharing with you now. I like to imprint things on my mind, especially when I know I'm going to have to train myself to do things in a certain way. The three letters I got spell the word "saw." It may not help you, but it helps me. Not in my own strength, that's the S. Not in my own ability, that's the A. Not in my own wisdom, that's the W. So, if you can remember that, then it helps you. And when I'm bracing myself and all my spiritual muscles are getting tense, I say not S-A-W, not in my own strength, not in my own ability, not in my own wisdom. But, by the supernatural grace of God.

I have come to appreciate the supernatural character of God's grace. I think Jim will probably remember in this very room some time ago I preached a message on Sunday morning about the grace of God. At the end Jim stood up and he said, "While Derek was finishing his message, I was aware of the grace of God coming in like a cloud." And one

of the figures I'd used was a cloud, which is in the book of Proverbs or Psalms. And he said, "If you need grace, just receive it now." I was the preacher; I was sitting down again in the congregation. I realized the specific area of my life in which I very much needed grace. I'm not free to say what it was but it was an area of relationships. At that moment I decided: I need grace. I'm not going to try and earn it, I'm not going to try and settle this in my own ability; I'm going to help myself to God's grace. And really, that situation and those relationships changed radically from that moment onwards. It was such a tremendous lesson to me, because I was really trying to do the right thing but I was trying in my own strength. Then God later on really kind of took me through this whole teaching very thoroughly by the Holy Spirit.

Turn to one other Scripture, Zechariah 4:6.

> "Then he answered and said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.'"

Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit. You have to put the nots first. You have to set those things aside before you can receive the grace of the Holy Spirit.

I looked at those words—I'm not absolutely declaring this as a final interpretation—but I was interested in the words for "might" and "power" in Hebrew. It seemed to me that in a certain sense the implication of "might" was material and the implication of "power" was physical. In other words, it's not by your material sources, nor is it by your personal strength. When you've set those two aside then you open up to the Holy Spirit.

See, the Holy Spirit very rarely forces His way in on us. If we can get along all right without Him, that's just what we do. He doesn't push in and say "You need Me." He waits to be acknowledged. To acknowledge Him, in a certain sense, we have to say first the negative. Not by any material resources— not by money, not by weapons and not by any strength of personality or will or body—but by the Spirit. See, there's only one agent in the universe that can do the things that need to be done in the hearts and lives of sinners. It's not education, it's not wealth; it's the Holy Spirit. There isn't any other agent so there's nothing else that can produce those results. We can go through all the motions and the activities, but if the Holy Spirit doesn't do it, the results will not be what are needed.

I've thought in this connection—this is going a little beyond our outline—that we need to get a fresh vision of conversion. We don't hear very much today about conversion. I believe in conversion. I believe that the Spirit of God can change a person totally in one encounter forever. Do you know why I believe that? Because He did it to me. It happened over forty years ago, there was very little intellectual content to it. I couldn't have explained the gospel, I couldn't even say I was born again, but the Holy Spirit came in and He radically, permanently and totally changed me. After forty years, I venture to say, it was real. I have never ever entertained the idea of going back. I've gotten discouraged, I've been fearful but there's never been anything behind me that for one moment has ever made it even worth entertaining the thought of going back.

I realize not everybody has that kind of experience, but I tell you what, I wish a lot more people did. I'm also inclined to believe that nothing else will meet the need of the present hour in America. I saw an advertisement in a major news magazine—I think it was U.S. News and World Report. It doesn't matter. I don't know what it was about, but there was just one question on the page which said, "Are the Japanese better people managers than the Americans?" I looked at it over Ruth's shoulder, she was reading it, and I said, "Do you know what I think? Leave out the word managers." Are the Japanese better people than the Americans?

The problem with American business is not techniques, it's persons. We don't have the quality of person that's needed to build a good automobile. That's the root problem. Or, do a lot of other things. We've lowered our standards; we've gone in for planned obsolescence. Who wants to buy planned obsolescence when you can buy craftsmanship? I believe the real root problem in this nation is there aren't enough good people. Who's going to change that? The only One who can do it is the Holy Spirit. It's good that we do all our things, but if the Holy Spirit doesn't come to our help, we can't do enough. I believe it's important we all see our need of the Holy Spirit in a totally new dimension.

I must go on. The next requirement, setting right priorities: the eternal before the temporal. Again, there is very little said about this in contemporary Christianity. Everybody's on a success syndrome. Prosperity. Get a Cadillac. Why stay with a Cadillac? I mean, there's better things than Cadillacs. But to a very high degree, American Christians today are focused on the material. There are certain good reasons. I believe God operates in the realm of material. I believe God has made provision for prosperity. But I believe if we get

our priorities wrong, we won't get the kind of prosperity that God intends us to have.

I'd like you to look at just a few Scriptures there. Hebrews 2:5. I just want you to see the theme.

> "He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking."

It's important to see the theme of Hebrews is the world to come. That's not the theme of much contemporary Christianity.

Then in Hebrews 13:14:

> "For we do not have a lasting city here, but we are seeking the city which is to come."

Is that true? I think there are a lot of contemporary Christians who are hardly aware there is a city to come. And sooner or later something is going to happen in their lives that will make them very conscious that this isn't our final resting place.

I was talking to a lady some while back about—I have to say this carefully, I don't want to reveal the identify of the persons because they're fairly well-known—about a certain Christian who was instantly killed in a very tragic accident. This lady was a member of that man's congregation. She said, "This thing has absolutely shattered the faith of my children" (who were also members of the congregation). She said, "What am I to say to them?" I said, "Teach them about the sovereignty of God." I don't think she'd ever heard of that.

See, God is not an automatic vending machine. Faith is not coming up with—it used to be a quarter but now even in heaven with inflation you have to have two quarters! Putting them in a slot and getting the right kind of drink. That's not God. God will not be treated as a vending machine. We have to have a sense of priorities.

Let's go quickly through these Scriptures. Matthew 6:33. These are the words of Jesus.

> "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

You notice the word "first." There's nothing wrong in the things, but they must not come first. First we seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness—spiritual issues—the material follow. That's Jesus' promise. I would have to testify to the faithfulness of God over many, many years that that has been proved true in my experience. I think I can say consistently I have not sought the material first, by the grace of God.

Let's compare with that 1 Timothy 6:9–10.

> "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang."

That's very strong language. Those who want to get rich—those who make riches their objective— fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. I have to say, on the basis of observation, that's true; I've seen it happen. It's essential we keep our priorities right.

Going on, F on Page 4/4. Maintaining a bold confession of our faith and our hope. I think we've spoken about that so many times we don't need to look at those Scriptures. But they're listed there.

Then the final requirement that I mention here, and I'm not suggesting this list is exhaustive, is eliminating any residual Canaanites. Going back to the example of Israel entering the Promised Land we can turn for a moment to Joshua 23:11–12:

> "So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God. For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, [verse 13:] know with certainty the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations from before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you."

I've dealt with so many people who were struggling with the presence of evil spirits in their lives as Christians and really, that's a vivid description. "A whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes." There's nothing that you could think of that would be in a way more painful or frustrating than thorns in your eyeballs. But God says, "If you allow the enemy forces to remain in your inheritance they will deprive you of your appointed rest."

Let me sum up and give a practical application. First of all, I think the principle is stated there. In this age today God offers us rest in relationship, not in situation. If you say, "If my situation were different I could rest," then you don't understand rest. The basis of rest in this age as God is dealing with us now, is not our physical or material situation, it's our relationship with the Lord, with one another in the Body of Christ. That's our inheritance. That's where we must look for rest.

Entering into rest, as I've said already, requires a definite, personal decision. In order to make it possible for you to take that decision, if the Holy Spirit so moves you, I have included in the outline a specimen of what I consider to be a needed decision. I'm going to read that out. You'll notice it there.

I believe that there is an appointed rest which it is God's will for me to enter.

I recognize that the great hindrance is unbelief. I therefore confess any and all unbelief as sin, and I renounce it in the name of Jesus.

I determine to rest from my own works and to do the work God has for me.

For all this I do not rely on my own ability, but on God's supernatural grace through Jesus Christ, my Savior and High Priest.

Now, I'm not asking anybody to put their signature there tonight. But, if what I've said touched you, convinced you, if you want to enter in as I've indicated, one, I believe the essential requirement is making a firm personal decision. If you wish to do that I suggest you take this home, pray, and then, as in the presence of God, if you're so prompted, sign your name and put the date. That won't solve all your problems forever but I believe it will take you through the gate.

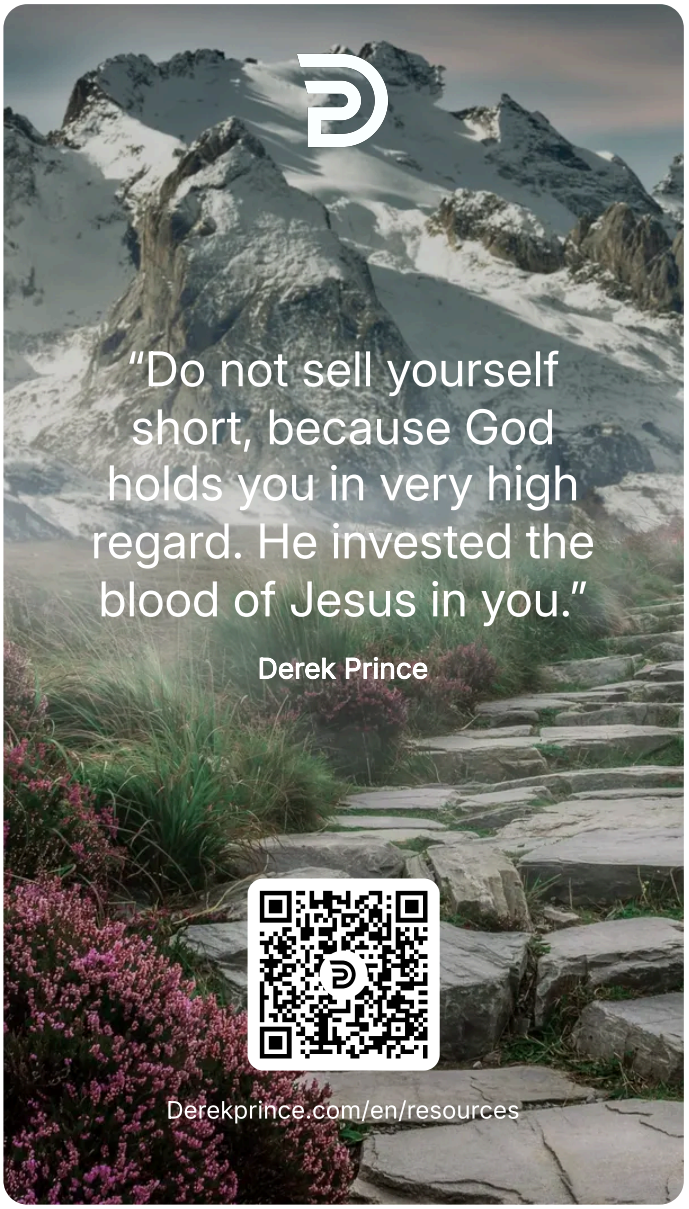
I tell you, since I made this outline I signed my name and put the date. Although I've had problems— would you believe it—there's been a difference in my experience. One of my big problems—I'm going to close now—nobody would guess it, I'm sure, but my first wife put her finger on it. She said, "Your problem is you are your own slave driver." I don't need anybody else to goad me on because I goad myself. But that's not rest. That's taking over the office of the Holy Spirit. I know the difference in my life when I'm relying on God's grace and when I'm doing it by my own strength.

So, I commend that decision to you. I cannot make it for you but Ruth and I will be praying for you.

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Sermon

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