

DON'T FALL SHORT OF GOD'S REST (Hebrews 4:1, 2)

INTRODUCTION

The title of the sermon this morning is Make Sure You Get To Heaven. And, has there ever been a more important topic than that? That is really the most important issue that you will ever face in this life. And you can't afford to be wrong on this matter.

Now this morning, I am preaching to every person that is within earshot and to anyone who might later read this sermon. And it will be relevant to every single one of you. If you have been a professing Christian for 70 years, this message is for you. If you have been a professing Christian for 70 minutes, this message is for you. If you have been a preacher or a deacon or a Sunday-School teacher, this message is for you. And, if you are a member of Grace Baptist Church or any other church, this message is for you. And this message will be relevant even to those who have never professed to know Christ, because we will be speaking about the critically important topic of entering into heaven.

Now there are only two ultimate destinies appointed unto men. Some will enter into heaven and some will enter into hell. And there is no in between. There is no middle ground. There is no pain in heaven and there is no comfort in hell. In heaven there are no more tears, but in hell there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. There is no soft side of hell and there is no hard side to heaven. In heaven the gracious arms of Jesus will hold you. In hell, you will be held only by eternal chains. In heaven there will be light, but in hell utter darkness.

You know, in life we often miss out on opportunities because of carelessness and lack of effort. But the opportunity of reaching heaven is one opportunity that we cannot afford to miss. The consequences of missing heaven are too dire. What is at stake is eternal life or eternal death.

Example: There is a poker game that is very popular right now called "No limit Texas hold em." And one of the characteristics of the game is that at any time a player can bet all his money. And if he is called, then he has everything riding on that one hand. He either doubles his money or he loses everything.

And every human being that has ever been born is all-in in the game of life. We have everything riding on one lifetime. And we are going to end up with everything we ever dreamed of or we will end up bankrupt in a lake of fire.

And the writer of Hebrews says,

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

Hebrews 4:1

Now there are several things that we must make clear about this verse in order to understand the principle that is being taught here.

I. First, we will look at the word rest.

And I would suggest to you that this rest that is mentioned in verse 1 is equivalent to heaven. It is the eternal rest that is achieved by a proper response to the gospel.

Look at verse two.

For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Hebrews 4:2

This rest that is spoken of here in Hebrews is not some spiritual rest that believers attain during this life, although there is a rest that comes immediately to believers. There is a peace that comes during this life. There is a laying down of the flesh and a relinquishing of works and a certain resting in the grace of God during this life. And that is rest to the soul in this life. But that is not what Hebrews speaks of. Hebrews is speaking of that greater rest - that ultimate rest - that we will enter into when we walk into heaven for the very first time.

None of us can fully imagine the rest that will come upon us when we enter heaven. There will be an unloading of all physical burdens, all the small pains and all the big ones. There will be an unloading of all the

physical impediments. You may have been one-legged here, but there you will be fully equipped. You may have diseases here, but not there. And as such, you will find rest from all the physical imperfections of this life.

But, then there also will be an easing of the trials of our souls. Sorrows and regrets will give way to joy and fulfillment. And where you labor spiritually in this life, in that day your spiritual labors will be swallowed up in spiritual enlightenment and you will enjoy the very presence of Christ and a certain fullness of the Holy Spirit that you do not have now. And when you step into heaven, you will breath out one final sigh of relief that will relinquish all your troubles. And then, you will understand why it is called a rest. You will have ceased from all your labors and all your difficulties and all your infirmities and you will rest. And it will be a long, long rest. It will be for all eternity.

I want you to understand that no other rest mentioned in the Scriptures, compares to this eternal rest of Hebrews.

Now there were days set aside for rest in the Old Testament. They were called Sabbath days. And when we think of the Sabbath day we tend to think of the seventh day of the week. And it is true that the Jews were commanded to keep the seventh day holy. But there were other Sabbath days – other days which were set aside for rest - days in which it was forbidden for Jews to do secular work. There was

1. Lev.23: 24, 32, 39
2. Lev. 25:4 (A rest to the land)

But these Sabbaths of the Old Testament were mere types and shadows of our heavenly rest. They were earthly rests. They were short rests. They were 24 hours long and then it was necessary to resume labor. They were repeated every week or every year as commanded by the Lord.

And not only did we have these Sabbath Days in the Old Testament, but there was another rest in the Old Testament. And that was the rest of entering into the promised land.

For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the Lord your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan and dwell in the

land which the Lord your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about . . .

Deuteronomy 12:9, 10

Until the Lord have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the Lord your God giveth them . . .

Joshua 1:15

So you see that possessing the land is equated here to rest.

But even this rest, the rest of possessing the land of Canaan, is a mere pittance of the rest that shall belong to those who enter that heavenly land, which is that final inheritance. There and only there shall there be found lasting rest. The rest found in the land of Canaan was an earthly rest, just like the Sabbath day was an earthly rest. And the rest found in the land of Canaan was a temporary rest. Some generations of the Jews enjoyed rest in the land for a season. Other generations never had rest. Some believe God will in the future bring a more complete rest to the Jews in the land of Canaan. But one thing is for certain. This rest from enemies in the land of Canaan will never, ever approach the rest that will be found by the saints of God who enter into that heavenly rest.

If you were to compare the Sabbath rest and the rest in the land of Canaan to our promised heavenly rest, it would be like comparing the value of a penny to the value of a million dollars. Why, the value of a penny is completely swallowed up by the value of the million dollars so as to be almost insignificant. There is no comparison in value because the Sabbath rest and the Canaan rest were mere types of our heavenly rest.

What is the value of a Jewish priest compared to the infinite value of our real priest Jesus? You see, the human priest had some value, but only as a type.

What is the value of an animal sacrifice compared to the real and efficient sacrifice of Jesus himself? Why there is no comparison. One was not effective at all but was a mere picture.

Likewise, there is no comparison in value between a Sabbath day of rest or the rest in the land of Canaan and that heavenly rest which is the

great promise of God to his saints.

When God made promises to Abraham, there were earthly promises and heavenly promises and the heavenly promises overshadowed all the earthly ones. And the Bible says that Abraham looked for a heavenly city. Why, because he looked past the types to see the reality. And when he looked past the types by faith, he saw the relative lack of value in the land of Canaan compared to the tremendous value of that heavenly city.

And so, when our text says,

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. (v.1)

This verse speaks of no less rest than that ultimate rest which will be found only in heaven. And it will be found only when we get there.

Example: Sonya and I just returned from a vacation on a cruise ship in Cozemel, Mexico. And on the day that we left to drive to the coast, it was cold and windy and miserable. And we couldn't wait to get on that ship and sail to somewhere that was warm. And it was a long drive to New Orleans where we would board the ship. And it was rainy and windy and cold. And when we got on the ship it was cold and we shivered while they gave us safety instructions. But we had hope that wherever we were going was going to be warm. And we went to bed that night in our little cabin and the ship was churning to the south and when we woke up the next morning lo and behold it was beautiful and sunny and warm.

And that's how it is with our heavenly rest. It is something that we look forward to. We can't wait to get there. But in order to enjoy that rest, we do have to travel a few years through this life but finally we will wake up one morning to a whole new world – and Hebrews calls this new world a rest.

This is a rest which we will not attain until we get there. Don't expect that you will have this rest in this life. You may have little rests in this life, moments of peace here and there and moments of gladness sprinkled in and I hope you have moments of spiritual rest during this life, but those wonderful times sprinkled here and there in this life only foreshadow your

ultimate rest.

This rest in Hebrews 4:1 is a rest that far surpasses anything that Judaism has ever known. And it far surpasses the types and shadows of Judaism. And it far surpasses the sprinklings of blessings that God makes upon us here from time to time.

So, what is that rest that is mentioned in Hebrews 4:1? It is that great and stupendous and heavenly rest that is the greatest promise of God ever given to man. It is a rest that is found in a place called heaven. It is a rest that is found in a person called Jesus. It is a rest that is immediate upon entrance into that great heavenly city. It is a rest that is imminent. That means that you could enter this rest at any moment. That is why Jesus said, "Watch therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour." And it is a rest that is permanent. You will never return to your labors as the Jews did after their Sabbaths which were only types. But this rest will be forever and ever.

I want you to notice also that,

II. There is a promise of entering into his rest.

This rest will be found only in heaven, and there is a promise of God that some shall enter in. What a glorious and wonderful promise that is. Some shall enter into God's rest. Were it not for that promise, we would all be without hope in the world. What if there was no promise at all? Then, we would live in utter fear of the future. Earthly gain would be our only pleasure and then in a moment it would all be lost and hell would be our reward for all eternity.

This promise of this rest is found throughout the Scriptures. It is found in the Jewish types like the Sabbaths and the land of Canaan. Promises of salvation are everywhere in the Scriptures. Jesus said,

Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

But notice also,

III. There is a danger that some will fail to lay hold of the promise.

Any of you should seem to come short of it. (v.1)

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 7:22

It is very clear from the Scriptures that some will lay hold of the promise of heaven and will someday enter into that eternal rest. But others will not enter in.

Some may run what seems to be a good race but will come up short.

Example: There was a football player once that broke away from the pack and he was headed for a touchdown and he got to the twenty and then the fifteen and then the ten and the five. And then, to the horror of his teammates, he tossed the ball down before he crossed the goal line. He did everything right except he came up a few feet short of crossing the line.

This is the picture here, there is a promise of God that allows us to go to heaven, and yet there are some who come up short.

And this message this morning is to serve as a warning so that we don't suppose we are going there when really we are not going there at all.

Our text says, "Let us therefore fear."

Now this seems odd advice, doesn't it? It says, "Fear, lest you come up short."

Example: I have a long-time friend who, when he was a new Christian, went on a visit with his pastor to see someone in the community. And in the course of the visit the pastor led this person down the Roman Road to salvation.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And at the end of the presentation the pastor asked this person if he would like to receive Christ as Savior and the person said, “Yes.” And so, the pastor led him in a prayer and the person repeated the words of the prayer. And when the prayer was over the pastor asked him if he was sincere in this prayer. And, of course, the man said, “Yes.”

And then, the pastor told this man that he was now a Christian and that if any doubts should ever come into his mind, he should look back on this moment as confirmation that he was truly saved. He said, “Drive a stake in the ground right here to commemorate this moment and never doubt your salvation.” Remember the words of your prayer and know that once you are saved you will always be saved.”

Now without being too critical, how does that kind of assurance match up with the warning of Hebrews 4:1?

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

The writer of Hebrews doesn't assure the reader of his salvation, but rather, warns him and encourages him to fear, lest he come up short.

Now I want you to consider who the readers of Hebrews were. And some would say, “They were believers.” They were Christians, because the book was written as an epistle to be read in the churches. And particularly, the book was addressed to the Hebrew Christians who were tempted with the idea of returning to Judaism and leaving the Christian faith.

But I would suggest to you that the book is addressed to Christendom – that is, all those who profess to belong to Christ.

You see, we know from the Scriptures that God has an elect people. And God chose them before the foundation of the world. And Jesus came to redeem each and every one of the elect. And Jesus performed the hard

work of redemption. And then, he sent the Holy Spirit to apply that work to the hearts of the elect and to draw the elect to Christ and to work continuously in the hearts of the elect to conform the elect to the image of Christ.

And you can see that salvation is, from beginning to end, a work of God. And therefore it is absolutely certain that every one of God's elect shall be saved and shall enter into that eternal rest.

But the trouble is, God does not tattoo the word "elect" across the foreheads of his people.

It is not readily physically apparent anyway who the elect are. Only God knows this information. He has written the names down in the Lamb's book of life, but we are not privileged with that information.

And so, when we come to church, we look out in the congregation and we see for the most part people who profess to know Christ. And that's all we can really say for sure, they profess to know him.

Do we have the right to assure anyone that they are saved and that they are going to heaven?

The writer of Hebrews doesn't say, "Rest at ease because you are going to heaven." Rather, he says, "Fear, lest you seem to come short of it."

Let's assume that every one of us would say this morning, "Yes, I profess that I am a Christian." That makes you a part of a large group of people that we call collectively Christendom. Does it prove you are elect of God? No. It only proves that you profess to be a Christian.

Sometimes people believe the gospel and they believe it for about 20 minutes until the emotional appeal wears off. These people might be described as those who received the seed into stony places.

Read Matthew 13:20, 21

Then, there are those who believe the gospel for a bit longer, but then the cares of this world choke out the seed of the gospel.

Read Matthew 13:22

So, you can easily see that there are those who receive the word and profess Christ for a time, but then by and by it is proven that they are not, after all, the elect of God and they come short of entering heaven.

This is why the writer of Hebrews said,

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

There is a searching of the heart that must be done day to day and week to week and year to year lest we deceive ourselves into a false sense of security. And I say this applies to preachers and to laymen. It applies to leaders and followers. And it applies to every person in this room.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 7:22

It says, "Let us fear."

1. Fear our own sinfulness.

Have you come to realize yet that your sin nature is a beast. It is the most powerful and compelling part of our old nature. Before we knew Christ it drove us into sins every day - horrible sins and devastating sins. And even after we have known Christ, like Paul, we cry, "Who shall deliver me."

Do you tremble at the possibilities of what your sin nature can yet do to you? Or are you living in some dream world where you think you are somehow immune because you uttered a prayer or made a profession?

And so I say fear your own sinful nature because if you follow the dictates of your old nature you will turn away from Christ. And you might turn away from him in an instant. And you might love your sin so much that you may never come back to Christ. And in the end you will come short of entering into his rest.

You see, we are not saying that the elect will ever fall away. But, many who profess Christ will fall away.

2. Fear our unbelief.

The writer of Hebrews was writing to Jewish professors who were on the brink of leaving their faith in Christ and returning to the works of Judaism.

You know, Christianity, in some respects, is so easy. You must simply lay aside any conception of your own merit and believe in the work and the merit of Christ for your salvation.

But somehow, that doesn't seem to satisfy the human mind. And many are tempted to devise any way to get to heaven except the right way and that is simple childlike faith in Jesus.

Even though your mind will try to convince you that you must do something to get there, you must believe that Jesus has done something to get you there.

Look at 4:2, 3.

3. Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

There is only One who can cast you into hell and that is God. No one else has that power. No one else has that authority. And the fact of the matter is that he will do it. If you leave the faith and reject Christ, then you will prove yourself to be a reprobate and you will come short of his rest.

You see, none of us has yet established irrefutable proof that we are the elect of God. We must establish that proof day after day and week after week and year after year. And we must keep believing.

What does the Bible say, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."