

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Hebrews 4: 1-6

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read Hebrews Chapter 4, and today we will read verses 1-6.

We must learn to enter the burden of the author when reading the Bible. By empathizing with the author, we attempt to enter his thoughts and sense the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we can truly understand what the Spirit wants to say to us through the Scriptures. The segmentation of the Scriptures is indeed important, as it helps us quickly grasp the main points of the text. However, on the other hand, thoughts are continuous, especially under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, often completed in one breath. Mechanical segmentation can easily cause interruptions.

In Chapter 3, Verse 1, the author clearly tells us that his audience is the "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." This means his audience is not unbelievers but saints who have been set apart for God and who have undertaken or shared the heavenly calling. They participate in the New Testament ministry of Jesus Christ. We can even go further to say that they have already taken up the commission God has entrusted to them. To these heavenly-called and sanctified saints, the author wants them to consider the dual roles of Jesus: first as Apostle, then as High Priest.

Regarding the role of Apostle, from 3:2 to 4:13, the author proves that Christ is superior to Moses. Regarding the role of High Priest, from 4:14 to 7:28, the author proves that Christ is superior to Aaron. An Apostle is sent by God to lead God's people to fulfill His mission and commission. Moses was sent by God, and his mission was to lead the congregation of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the promised land of Canaan. However, due to the unbelief of the Israelites, the first generation of Israelites, except for Joshua and Caleb, all fell in the wilderness, and even Moses himself could not enter the promised land to enjoy

rest. Chapter 3 ends with the conclusion that they could not enter rest because of unbelief.

Please take note here, brothers and sisters, the author introduces a very crucial point here: the promised land is a place of rest; the purpose of entering the promised land is to enjoy rest. The word "rest" is mentioned ten times in 4:1-13 and is the keyword of this passage. The author systematically introduces rest, starting from God completing His work of creation and establishing rest, to the ultimate rest when God's people can fully enter it. Between these two points, the Old Testament Israelites serve as a negative example of failing to enter rest. First, the Israelites who left Egypt but perished in the wilderness could not enter the promised land to enjoy rest. Then, even those who followed Joshua into the promised land did not truly experience rest.

The author thus introduces another Sabbath-rest that New Testament saints must strive to enter. The author broadens our perspective. Some saints believe that leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea is sufficient, but the author tells us that merely believing and being baptized is not enough to enter true rest. Other saints may think that crossing the Jordan River into Canaan is ideal, but the author tells us that simply being baptized into the church life is not entering true rest. So, what exactly is true rest?

In this passage, the author mentions only that there is another Sabbath-rest, without explaining what this true rest is. This is because to enter true rest, one must go beyond the apostolic role of Moses and also experience the high priestly role of Aaron. Or more precisely, one must experience the apostolic role of Jesus Christ, which brings one into church life. Additionally, one must experience the high priestly role of Jesus Christ to boldly pass through the veil, enter the Holy of Holies, and come before God. That is true rest. This is from the personal aspect.

From a corporate perspective, God is calling overcomers in the church today. This group of overcomers will, at Christ's return, enter the heavenly aspect of the millennial kingdom, reign with Christ, and enjoy the true rest of that era. After the millennium, Satan and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire, and the entire

universe will be cleansed, ushering in the new heaven and new earth. At that time, the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven, and all the saints of both the Old and New Testaments who have received grace and salvation will enjoy eternal rest in the New Jerusalem. With this broad overview, we now approach today's scripture.

Verse 1: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it."

The conclusion at the end of Chapter 3 is that the Israelites who fell in the wilderness could not enter the promised land to enjoy rest because of their unbelief. Chapter 4 begins with a conjunction, "therefore," which connects directly to the thoughts at the end of Chapter 3. (This conjunction is not rendered in the Chinese Union Version.) The word "therefore" indicates a continuation of the thought, as the author turns to his intended audience—the Hebrew saints—and includes himself by saying, "a promise remains of entering His rest." This promise refers to entering His rest, and we ought to fear or be vigilant, lest any of us seem to have come short of it. Just like the Israelites who fell in the wilderness, they took God's promise too lightly, thinking that leaving Egypt and crossing the Red Sea was enough. They failed to pay attention to God's promise that they were to enter the promised land to enjoy rest.

Similarly, for the Hebrew saints or for us today, believing, being baptized, and leaving the bondage of the world is only the first step. We have not yet reached the finish line; we must pass through the wilderness. Our soul is often like a wilderness, wandering aimlessly. Our body, through baptism, has declared its position of being dead to the world, just as the Israelites left Egypt. However, our soul often still loves the treasures of the world, and our mind frequently meditates on worldly matters, preventing our will from choosing God's promised rest.

Verse 2: "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it."

Here, the gospel refers to the full gospel—not only forgiveness of sins but also the journey through the wilderness to enter the promised rest. Jesus Christ has prepared a complete salvation, and we are called to accept and experience this full salvation until we enter rest. "Them" refers to the Israelites who fell in the wilderness. The gospel preached to them was the same: they were to enter the promised land and enjoy rest. However, the word which they heard did not benefit them, that is, the message given to them about entering the promised land did not help them. Though they heard it, they ultimately perished in the wilderness. Therefore, that word was of no benefit to them. The author reminds us here that merely hearing the word is not enough.

Dear brothers and sisters, consider your own experience: if you have been saved for several years and have faithfully participated in church life, you may have heard hundreds of sermons over the years. Have all these messages truly benefited you? This is a question we must deeply reflect on and take as a warning.

Why did the word not benefit them? The author tells us it was because they did not mix it with faith. This is crucial. Simply hearing the word makes it an objective truth, floating and detached, unable to restrain or benefit us. Only when faith mixes with the word does it truly help us. Faith is the means of accessing grace. It can be a channel, a power, or a measure. When we hear a good message, we must draw grace from Jesus Christ so that the message becomes our experience.

First, we need a channel to bring grace to us. God may arrange a difficult situation for us. According to the message we have heard, we know how we should handle it, but doing so may result in loss or suffering. At this point, faith must first serve as a channel to draw grace from Christ, enabling us to handle the situation according to what we have heard. During this process, faith provides the power of grace to help us persevere. Finally, when the matter is resolved, faith becomes the measure of our experience of grace.

In this way, the word mixes with our faith and becomes our subjective experience, becoming part of who we are. The word mixed with faith is what truly helps us. This faith is not something we inherently possess but is the means by which we access Christ's grace. Those with great faith are those who have learned to access Christ's grace through various means.

Verse 3: "For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: 'So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world."

In this verse, the author shifts our focus to rest. He still refers to the Hebrew saints as "we" and the Israelites who fell in the wilderness as "they." God promises that those of us who believe may enter that rest. This is not a guarantee that everyone will enter that rest but a conditional entry—certain conditions must be met. The author refers to rest as "that rest," contrasting it with God's declaration in wrath: "They shall not enter My rest." This was stated earlier in 3:11, referring to the Israelites who continually tested and provoked God, leading Him to declare that they would never enter His rest.

Of course, from Israel's history, we know that these people all died in the wilderness and could not enter the land of Canaan to enjoy the rest there. But the author emphasizes here that God said they could not enter "My rest"—this is God's rest. The author skillfully connects the rest that the Hebrew saints could enter with God's rest. He then explains what God's rest means; this takes us back to the beginning of God's creation. In Genesis chapter 1, we see that God's work of creation was completed, and it was perfect. The Word of God is powerful; through His speaking, the work of creation was accomplished.

Verse 4: "For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.'"

This is a reference to Genesis 2:2. God completed the work of creation in six days, and on the seventh day, He rested from all His works—God rested. This is God’s rest. Not only had God completed the work of creation, but He was also satisfied with His creation, so He ceased all His works. God’s rest is true rest. This refers to the rest of creation. Of course, we know that by Genesis chapter 3, man had fallen, and sin had entered the world. Therefore, God began His work of redemption, which would ultimately bring about the new creation—a work that is not yet finished.

In John 5:17, Jesus said to the Jews who were persecuting Him, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” The context here is that Jesus healed a man who had been lying by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years—on the Sabbath. What should have been a cause for rejoicing became a reason for the Jews to persecute Jesus because He worked on the Sabbath. Jesus plainly told them, not only do I work, but My Father also works, because sin has entered, and sinners do not have rest. Out of His love for the world, the Father cannot rest either; He must send His only begotten Son to complete redemption and begin the new creation.

The old creation was accomplished through God’s speaking. The new creation, however, required the Father to sacrifice His only begotten Son to gain His many sons. This is a work of life-building, far more challenging than the old creation, but also far more glorious. Although the new creation is difficult, it is not our work. Christ has already completed it for us, and we only need to enjoy rest.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” New Testament saints must take the Lord’s yoke and learn His way, then they will enjoy rest in Christ. Here we see that whether in the old creation or the new creation, God promises us that we may enter His rest.

Verses 5-6: “And again in this place: ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience.”

Here, the author once again quotes the words from Hebrews 3:11, explaining that God promised people they could enter His rest, but it was conditional. Those who followed Moses out of Egypt but died in the wilderness could not enter God's rest because of their disobedience. They constantly tested God and provoked Him to anger, so God declared that they would never enter His rest. Here we see that entering the land of Canaan and enjoying its rest is the first step to entering God's rest. These Israelites failed to even attain the earthly rest, so naturally, they could not enter God's rest. This was because they heard the word but did not mix it with faith, and as a result, they could not enter the Promised Land, leaving them without a share in God's rest.

In today's context, it's like someone who hears the gospel, enjoys it, believes in it, and even gets baptized, but never truly enters church life. This person resembles the Israelites who left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, but failed to enter the land of Canaan and died in the wilderness. They heard the word but did not mix it with faith, and so the word could not help them enter the Promised Land. Entering the Promised Land is the first step to enjoying God's rest. In today's terms, it means you must enter into church life to have the possibility of enjoying God's rest. May we all take this reminder to heart.

Let us pray together: Lord, how grateful we are to You for preparing a complete salvation for us. Not only have You, through our faith in Your work on the cross, forgiven our sins and given us eternal life, but You also desire us to enter the Promised Land, which is to remain in church life. Only then can You continue to bestow more grace upon us so that we may eventually enter into the true rest of God. Bless the church I belong to, and grant the church a sweet ministry that allows every baptized and blessed saint to remain in church life. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.