



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 4:1–13; Psalm 95

“God’s Rest and Man’s Rest”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the long preparation of the Old Testament ages; those many indications that thou didst give of the coming redeemer, that the woman’s seed should crush the head of the serpent, that Abraham’s seed should be the one through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed, and David’s seed should reign upon a throne forever and ever, with an eternal kingdom. And we thank Thee for the coming of our Lord in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament period. And we thank Thee for the marvelous way in which he carried out Thy perfect will. We thank Thee, too, Lord, for the Scriptures, which Thou hast given to us, through the Holy Spirit and, through holy men of God, who wrote under his direction. We thank Thee for the preservation of Scripture and that today, all of us may hold in our hands the word of God. And we are grateful, Lord, and we pray that accompanying the holding in our hands of the word of God there may be the ministry of the Spirit to give us submission, as we read and ponder the things that are found in the word of God. We thank Thee for the plainness with which Thou hast spoken to us. Thou hast reminded us of our sin and Thou hast shown us that the way of release and the way of blessing is through faith in him who has come and who is coming again.

And, Lord, we pray that in our lives there may be a reflection of what we say on our lips and say that we have in our minds. We commit our evening to Thee in the study of the Scriptures. We

pray that each of us may find blessing that is suitable for us in our own personal lives. Now, we ask that Thou will be with each one of us.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] We’re turning to Hebrews chapter 4, and our passage for the evening is verse 1 through verse 13. The subject is “God’s Rest and Man’s Rest.” The passage is not an easy passage. Many students of the Bible have pondered it and have wondered precisely what it does mean and some of the features of it but we will look at it, and I’m sure the general thought of it will come home to us.

Let me begin and read verse 1 through verse 13, and then I would like to go back and read Psalm 95, because it really is important that we have that in our minds as we read chapter 4, since the author quotes from it a couple of times, again, quoted from it in chapter 3, also.

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 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.”

And let me stop for just a moment and point out this simple fact, which you probably understand, that when he says, “the gospel was preached to us as well as to them,” referring to Old Testament individuals, he does not mean the “gospel” in the sense of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as we now know the Gospel, the way that the Apostle Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. He means the “good news” of the divine rest, which was promised in the Old Testament and, also, is still promised to them. It’s helpful if we remember that the term, gospel, may be used in a technical sense of Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and was raised again, and was seen. That’s the technical term of the gospel. But it also means, simply, good news. So the good news concerning the Abrahamic Covenant, that there would

be a seed of Abraham, through whom the whole world would be blessed, all the families of the earth be blessed, that’s called gospel in Galatians chapter 3 in verse 8, also. It is good news.

So good news is the characteristic expression to keep in mind, but the details of it vary with the particular context. Now, in 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.””

It’s very interesting. You wouldn’t think that that was evidence of entering the rest, but the fact that he said that certain people, who were disobedient, that he swore that they would not enter into his rest is evidence that there was a rest, and that’s his point.

“Although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 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 work;’ 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, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said, “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest.”

Some of you have the Authorized Version, may note that your text reads, “Jesus.” Jesus and Joshua are the same name. Jesus is the Greek name; Joshua the Hebrew name. My text has made the correction and your text, if it’s the Authorized Version, probably has in the notes, Joshua rather than Jesus because your text would have Jesus. But, it’s Joshua. He’s talking about Joshua.

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that

rest, lest anyone fall [or fail] according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Now, I’d like for you to turn to Psalm 95. It’s not a long psalm and I’d like to read that psalm, also, because that’s the message from the Old Testament that our author has on his mind. This is the psalm that is called, *Venite*, because its term or its name is derived from the first words.

“O come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

“God’s Rest and Man’s Rest.” Men long for peace and rest on earth, but two fatal flaws in their longing exist. Utopia is something that they cannot arrive at. The flaws are simply these; they want it now, that is, they want the leopard and the kid that Isaiah speaks about in chapter 11, to “lie down together today.” They want the lion to eat straw, like the ox, here and now. They want

everything now. And the second thing that is one of the fatal flaws of man’s longing for utopia, is the fact that he wants it from man, from himself.

Now, we’ve just gone through a political campaign and you must have been deaf if you have not heard the political candidates speaking as if they were messiahs. Each one who runs for office speaks of the glorious things that are going to happen, if we follow their particular principles. Well, we’re living in the year of nineteen ninety-three, and there has never been a political leader who has ever been able to carry out his promises, as he has promised them.

I think of Nebuchadnezzar in his palace walking about and saying, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty.” Men are unwilling to recognize the fact that we live in a fallen world and to seek for the reasons why this world has fallen. And then by God’s grace to become conformed to those things that God tells us will give us deliverance from the misery that exists in human life.

In other words, mankind has a deficient historical perspective. He’s forgotten the past, he’s failed to get help for the future. What he needs to do is to do what the psalmist did in Psalm 73, he needs to go into the sanctuary and take a good look at things from the divine standpoint. That psalm is one of my favorite psalms, and I read it again this afternoon. The psalmist is speaking of the problem of the prosperity of the wicked, and he writes things like this.

“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. [Now, this is something he wrote when he had finished his meditation. This is the lesson that he learned.] But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; [These individuals were individuals who had self-esteem wrapped all around their necks as the psalmist puts it.] Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they

have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.”

That was such an interesting expression there, “tongue walks through the earth.” There came to my mind an old song, as I was reading this, I stopped and thought about it. “Have you ever seen a dream walking?” “Have you ever seen a tongue walking?” A tongue walking, through the earth. [Laughter] When Martha came home, I sang for her, too and she said, “Well, I haven’t seen a tongue walking, but I’ve seen them wagging.” [More laughter] And so you can tell how old I am when I remember a song in “B.E.” time, that’s “Before Elvis” time, in case you want to know what it is.

But listen to what our psalmist goes on to say.

“Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’ [Isn’t that characteristic of our day? Does anyone know about God?] Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. [The psalmist says.] For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I had said, “I will speak thus,” behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children when I thought how to understand this. [That is the prosperity of the wicked and the lowliness of Israel.] It was too painful for me, until [Notice that!] until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. Surely [Lord] You set them in slippery places; you cast them down to destruction. O, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; you hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is

none upon earth that I desire besides You. Thus go the desire for riches and fame and prosperity, and all of the other things that we chase after on this earth. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.”

And that brings us back to verse.

“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.”

That really is the problem that most of us have. We tend to look at things horizontally instead of vertically. In other words, man has this deficient historical perspective. He’s forgotten his past, he’s failed to get help for the future, he needs to go into the sanctuary for light. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has the clue to history. Jesus Christ has come and He will come. In the meantime, we rest patiently for God’s rest to come.

Now, if you were here, last Wednesday night, we talked about the illustrations of unbelief, which were found in chapter 11. What our author does is to compare Moses and Christ, and he’s showing, of course, that Christ is greater than Moses and then, he’s taken up Psalm 95 as his text, in order to warn those who are reading his letter, and any others who might read it later on, of the danger of failing to really appropriate the truth of God. He reminds them of the things that happen to the children of Israel and Rephidim, when they doubted the presence of God among them. What did they do? The Lord had led them out of Egypt in a marvelous deliverance that brought them through the Red Sea, they’re hardly on the other side of the Red Sea when they say, “We don’t have any water.” No water.

Now, we live in nineteen ninety-three. All of us can go to the faucet and turn on our water, so we don’t say, “Lord, we don’t have any water.” What we say is something that’s a little bit

different. It’s more suitable for our time. It’s more like, “We don’t have financial security.” Or, “We have physical problems.” Those are our “No waters” whatever it is. And we can all fill in the blanks spaces because all of us have them. That’s precisely what Israel was experiencing. They were finding that they didn’t have what they thought they ought to have. And what were they doing? They were complaining. They did not realize those great promises, that God had given them that he was with them, and the manifestation of that, in the miraculous deliverances that he had given to them, and so no water. And they looked around for scapegoats, and Moses was a good one. And so that’s precisely what we do, isn’t it? We look for scapegoats. And, particularly, in churches, you know, you can see human nature in the church so, if things are not going precisely, it’s somebody’s fault. And it isn’t hard for us to find someone that we can be critical of. Those are our “No waters” as a body of people. I’m not speaking of Believers Chapel. I’ve been in enough churches to know, this is universal. It’s universal because it’s within universal human nature. We look for scapegoats. And so Israel looked for scapegoats.

And then they had forty years in the desert. You would think you would learn in forty years, wouldn’t you? But our author has taken that incident at Rephidim and then he’s taken the second incident, forty years later, when the children of Israel, when Moses as their leader was told to “speak to the rock” rather than to strike it. And you’ll remember, that Moses, instead of speaking to the rock, smote it twice, while he said, “Must we bring water out of the rock.” Amazing, he’s already taken to himself, arrogated to himself, the power of God. It’s God who performs miracles but Moses’ saying, “Must we” do this. So again the same lesson. Our author calls it an example of unbelief in chapter 4, verse 1, “Let us therefore be diligent, to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”

And we talked last Wednesday night about the fact that faith and unbelief are very serious things. These are not trifling matters. In fact, unbelief is not a trifling sin. It’s a deadly sin; it’s a fatal sin. It means, of course, if we have never believed in Christ, that we have fatally lived apart from the forgiveness of sins. But as Christians, unbelief is the fatal sin. Every day we have an opportunity to

believe. But if we do not believe, if we do not rest, to use his word, if we do not rest, that’s not a trifling thing. That’s a big thing; that’s a big thing for all of us.

The reason that I’m able to speak so assuredly about this is because I’ve failed, right here, so often. But it’s important. Unbelief! And I’m sure that if you think about the word of God at all, you’ll know that it’s filled with illustrations of this. I think I made reference, last Wednesday night, I’ve forgotten, to the crises that was in Judah, at the time when Ahaz was the king, and the king of Syria, Rezin, and Pekah, the king of Israel were attacking Judah, and Ahaz was very much troubled. And the Lord spoke to him, through Isaiah the prophet, and said to him, “It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass, for the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin, within sixty-five years, Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son.” Now, notice these words, “If you will not believe surely you shall not be established.” And the Lord called upon Ahaz to ask for a sign. Ask a sign for yourself, from the Lord your God. Ask it either in the depth or the height above. And Ahaz said, “I don’t want to ask from the Lord a sign. I wouldn’t test Him. God’s invited him to do it.” So he said, “No, I wouldn’t want to do that.”

But this statement, surely, verse 9, the last part of verse 9, “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established,” is so beautiful in the Hebrew text because it’s just the kind of thing that someone would remember. *Im lo’ ta’aminu, ki lo’ te’ amenu. Im lo’ ta’aminu, ki lo’ te’ amenu.* A play on words so they would remember. So as he says, “If you will not believe, surely, you will not be established.”

Now, the author is going to admonish the Hebrew readers against failure. And, I think, I need to say just a word about the kinds of rest that are found in the Bible. There are really three kinds of rest, and, I think, we say this then we can go through the passage rather quickly. There is, first of all, the rest of salvation.

Now, we all know how, before we found the Lord as our Savior, if we thought at all about spiritual things, unless the Holy Spirit awakened us suddenly, we thought about the ways by which

we may gain approval with the Lord God by the works that we do. The world is full of that. The world believes that we get to heaven by our good works. That’s why there’s so much in the Bible about good works shall not get you to heaven. The simplest texts, “For by grace are you saved through faith, that, not of yourselves, it’s the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.” So we think we’re going to get to heaven by our good works. Good works covers lots of things with a lot of people. I grew up in the kind of society in which it was a good work to be living in the part of town in which I was living, to have the kind of family that I had, to be invited to become a member of the St. Cecilia’s Society; that qualified as good works because God never rejected a member of the St. Cecilia Society. Surely! In fact, the apostles themselves had to get special invitations to attend, I’m sure, if it had been in existence in those days.

But then, of course, we think of the ways in which by religion we get to heaven; I’m a Baptist or I’m a Presbyterian or I’m a member of the Christian denomination or I’m a member of a fundamentalist church or whatever the case may be. So, finally, the Lord God has to cause us to realize through the Holy Spirit that we are lost, and the Gospel comes to us and we realize we cannot get to heaven on the basis of what we do, but salvation must come as a gift, so that we have no claims on God, whatsoever, because he’s trying to teach us what we are, and he’s trying to teach us also, what he is, a God of lovingkindness, mercy and grace. That’s the kind of God we have. And so we learn that we’re not saved by our works and we are told, and that’s what we do, we rest in which Jesus Christ has done. Put it this way, a little better, we rest in Jesus Christ and what he has done. That’s the rest of salvation; no longer trying to work my way to heaven. Constant defeat is that way. That’s the first rest.

I think, it’s what our Lord was talking about in passages like Matthew chapter 11 in verse 28, when in this very familiar passage, you’ll remember it when I read it, I know, if you don’t know it already, the Lord Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The rest of eternal salvation, so we never for any time after that ever boast about what we have done in order to attain the salvation.

But there’s also a rest of sanctification, which the Lord is trying to teach us. It’s what we might call the rest from the activity of the self-life, which is still a part of our being. Have you noticed, after you’ve become a Christian, I speak to those of you who are Christians, that you still have a lot of the same kinds of problems? Did you notice that when you became a Christian you still were afflicted with such things as greed, jealousy, envy, in fact, all of the seven deadly sins; you probably can find some traces of all of them in your life. And then the Holy Spirit, who now indwells you, begins the work after you’ve been saved, begins the work of bring you to the place where you stop in your Christian self-life of trying to justify your existence before the Lord and win holiness by your activities. And so you start learning the simple principle that life is to be lived by faith in the working of God, who dwells within us.

And so when those “no waters,” “no food,” “no bread,” that’s what Israel had to face, when all of those experiences come, what do you do? You turn it over to the Lord and expect him to meet your need. There are many ways in which some of you in this audience, I know, have discovered the truth of that. That God has promised, has sworn that he will take care of all of his saints. Isn’t that marvelous? Isn’t that marvelous to know that he has sworn that he will take care of all of his saints, in the experiences of life, whatever they are. Maybe that’s what our Lord was saying about finding rest in that same passage. But, at any rate, this rest is God’s rest. Some have called it a faith-rest life. I think that’s pretty good. I think that’s certainly true.

I was reading in my notes this afternoon, something that I had clipped out some time ago, about Bishop Westcott, who was a British Evangelical Anglican, and who has written some marvelous books that I still read in my studies, including a commentary on this great epistle. But this particular thing that I cut out, it’s not in his commentary. “The son of the scholarly and saintly Bishop Westcott said, concerning his father, in his later life, ‘My father obviously lived in two worlds at once. While his feet were set in the world, his spirit was in the presence of God. Everything that came to him was met in that presence. Nothing could ever surprise him from that attitude.’”

That’s what life “in the holiest” really means, when the experiences of life come from a sovereign God who controls our circumstances, and in the midst of them we turn to the Lord and say, “Lord, you have brought this into my life. Now, give me the strength to rely upon you in this experience?” We call that the “present rest” of holiness, sanctification. Holiness in the sense, not of sanctimoniousness, but holiness in the sense of separation to the Lord God.

Now, there’s a third rest, and that’s what our author speaks about. This is the rest that man is to enjoy forever. It is the rest that we anticipate with the coming of the kingdom of God upon the earth. That rest, that Sabbath rest, as we shall see, the kingdom of God upon the earth, when the promises of God have reached their fruition and God rules and reigns over all of this earth. It may be called the Millennium, for the first thousand years of it form a millennium, but it is a kingdom that extends, also, into the indefinite future, the eternal future.

I was reading this afternoon, in a book that I have, on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and the author was talking about this particular passage. And I had not noticed one of these comments and the other was appropriate, and so I’d like to mention them.

Hendrikus Berkhof is a well-known liberal Dutch theologian. Now, he has been a bit disturbed over the things that have happened in history since, in nineteen forty-eight, Israel came into existence. And Berkhof is in the Reformed church of the Netherlands, which basically does not believe in a kingdom of God upon the earth and the fulfillment to the nation Israel of those promises in the word of God. Most of those men believe those promises are no longer applicable to Israel, ethnic Israel, but will be enjoyed by the church at large. Well listen to what he said. “With the surprising geographical and political fact of the establishment of the State of Israel,” this was nineteen forty-eight, as you know, “the moment has come to begin to watch for political and geographical elements in God’s activities, which we have not wanted to do in our Western dualism, docetism, and spiritualism.”

Here is a theologian, one of the best-known of the Netherlands, in fact, one of the best known among Protestant theologians of a liberal bent and saying that we may expect “political and

geographical elements in God’s activities” lying before us. It’s almost as if he were saying, “I’m going to become a premillennialist. He doesn’t say that but that is what it sounds like.

And then, Willis Beecher, lecturing some years ago, at Princeton Seminary, chided them by saying, “But if the Christian interpreter persists in excluding ethnical Israel from his conception of the fulfillment or in regarding Israel’s part in the matter as merely preparatory and not eternal, then he comes into conflict with the plain witness of both testaments.” The reason that he’s saying this, of course, is because those promises of the covenant and the blessings of the covenants of the Old Testament are said to be “everlasting” covenants. They’re serious in the word of God. His interpretation, he continues, “is even less consistent with the text than is the exclusive Jewish conception. Rightly interpreted, the biblical statements include in the fulfillment, both Israel, the race with whom the covenant is eternal, and also the personal Christ and his mission with the spiritual Israel of the redeemed in all ages.” So when we talk about the future rest of the kingdom, we’re talking about those great promises in the word of God, over and over in the Old Testament that say that ethnic Israel has a glorious future lying before it.

I know you expected me to say something about where I am in reading the Bible. So I’m finishing up Hosea, and I’m very deflated. I was proud, thinking that I might be leading everybody in this congregation in reading through the Bible. And Estelle is way ahead of me. And I’ve got to turn to the Lord and ask Him to deliver me from my pride [Laughter] and feeling of disappointment that I’m not first. But to get to the point, I’ve been impressed, again, reading through these great prophecies, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel, what God said through those prophets about the coming kingdom of God that was eternal. Those everlasting promises. We cannot read the Bible and forget that. It’s very important.

Now, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in my opinion, does not forget them. Now, will you follow with me, as I’m going to look down through the verses and make comments as we go along beginning at 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. For indeed the good news was preached to us as well as to them; but the word, which they heard did not profit them.”

He’s talking about those individuals in the Old Testament who had the good news of the promises of God given to them, the Patriarchs to Abraham to Isaac and Jacob, but who did not believe and fell away.

“For we who have believed do enter into rest,’ as He has said.”

Now, when he says “do” he means in the sense of “because we have believed, we are in process of entering into that rest.” He uses the present tense here. It’s been called the futuristic present. “We who have believed do enter that rest.” That’s our hope. We do enter it. You in this audience, who have believed in Christ, you are in process of entering into that rest, if you are a believer. You may not even know it, but you are; you are on the way to the kingdom of God, is what he means. So we do enter into the rest, as he has said.

“So I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.””

Now, the reason that sounds contradictory, if you think about it for a moment, all he wants to do is, simply, to affirm that there is a rest, and the fact that he’s sworn his wrath at certain ones would not enter into his rest is evidence there was such a thing as a rest. God would never say, “You’re not going to enter into my rest,” if there was no rest at all. So the fact that he warned the Old Testament professing individuals, “You’re not going to enter into the rest,” is evidence that there is such a rest.

“For [he goes on to explain] for he has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way, ‘And God rested in the seventh day from all His works.’”

Well, what has that got to do with it? Well, you’ll remember, when God created his world, what a bright and glorious and beautiful and holy world it was. And then, he rested from his works. That world, a glorious, bright, holy world, created by God, and he rested. And you’ll notice, on the seventh day in the Scriptures, it does not say there was morning and there was evening. It said that about the other six; but not about the seventh, because that day is looked at as continuing forever. Except that there occurred a fall, didn’t there? In the 3rd chapter, a fall. That disturbed the rest of God, in that sense. So God rested on the seventh day from His works. Incidentally, the kingdom of God upon the earth is the extension of that rest which God enjoyed when he created all things and the beauty and glory of that creation. Verse 5:

“‘And again in this place, they shall not enter My rest.’ Since therefore it remains over.”

That’s the meaning of that Greek word, incidentally, it’s a term that really means literally, “to remain over” that is the promise is carried on. It’s still in the Bible, even though man has sinned.

“Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David.”

Now, that’s in Psalm 95. He doesn’t mean David was the author of that psalm. If you looked at Psalm 95, you’ll see it doesn’t have the name of an author over it. But it’s the term, the expression that was used to say, “In the part of the Bible where the psalms are,” is the meaning. We could translate it, “In the Psalter,” as we would say. “Seeing in the Psalter, today, after such a long time.” Think of it. Centuries have passed since the original promises of the kingdom of God, since

the creation, since the original promises, and in the psalms, the psalmist speaks still of a rest. It’s still there, for the entering. So.

“Saying in David, ‘Today, after such a long time, today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’”

In other words, in David’s time, in the time of the Psalms, the rest could be entered.

“For He said, ‘For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.’”

You probably thought that when Moses brought them up to the Promised Land and Joshua brought them in, that was the rest. No, no. You read the Old Testament. Joshua did not give them rest. If Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken years later in Psalm 95, that there is a rest. You get the point? Joshua and the children of Israel, entering the rest of the land, did not fulfill the “rest” of the land as in the word of God. He would not have spoken of another day.

“There remains therefore [verse 9] there remains, therefore, here, in this age [when this man wrote the New Testament age] a rest for the people of God.”

The word that he uses is very interesting. You’ll recognize it immediately. You don’t know any Greek, but you’ll know this. It’s a *sabbatismos*. You get it, don’t you? What kind of rest? Say it? A Sabbath rest. A Sabbath rest. That’s very interesting because, in the early church, they thought of the kingdom of God as illustrated by the Sabbath. *sabbatismos*. In fact, in the early church, in the some of the apostolic writers, they regarded the history of the world as being a seven-thousand-year history, like the days of the book of Genesis. And, the last day, the seventh day, would be the

Sabbath. And that was the day, the thousand years that corresponded to the millennial kingdom. You’ll find that in some of the earlier writers, just after the apostles. The Sabbath. The Sabbath is the kingdom, the Sabbath rest. Our author picks up on that and calls the kingdom that is to come, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. *sabbatismos*. The original intended rest when God created the heavens and the earth, and specified no length for that seventh day; that original intended rest, now attained as a result of the redemption that Jesus Christ has come and accomplished.

Now, we read back in chapter 2. I want to see how well you’ve followed along and you experts, you experts in Hebrews up to chapter 4, at the present time. You have no excuses. I’ve just been giving you the word and it should have been going in and lodging in your minds. You remember, back in chapter 2 in verse 5, he wrote.

“For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying, ‘What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You’ve made him a littler lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. [See, he’s talking about the creation. Lyrically, this is Psalm 2, looking back at Genesis, the Psalmist is writing a poem about the creation.] You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ [That was Adam in the Garden of Eden. Now he says.] For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now [Now, as he looks around now in this age, now.] We do not yet see all things put under him. [What a discouraging note. What a disappointment. Glorious future, but now, we don’t have this situation. Man’s not over the creation. Ninth verse.] But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for everyone.”

Ah, as we look around, we don’t see the kingdom at all. We see the world that God created, fallen, and the evidences of the fall everywhere. Read the newspapers, all of them, read anything

about this world. The evidences of the fall. What do we, as Christians, do? But we see Jesus. He has overcome. He has died for that sin that this world is so immersed in. And, the time is coming when that great redemption shall become a fact of human experience. And those who are the believers shall enter into that rest and enjoy the intended rest that God has set forth in the word of God. He calls it a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Now, let me go on and finish up here. He says.

“For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”

In other words, the person who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ has ceased from his works of self-justification, self-sanctification, and, ideally, he’s walking by faith in God. And, what is he looking forward to? The kingdom of God, the glorious kingdom of God. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus and the kingdom.

Now, the 11th verse, incidentally, I’m not going into detail here about the Jewish teachers and followers and others who make the point that the Sabbath prefigured the world to come, the day which shall be “all Sabbath,” they said. I’ve tried to make that point. I don’t need to go into great detail. We need to finish up. So in verse 11 through verse 13.

“Let us therefore.”

That is, in the light of the fact there is a rest of God and, also, since it is possible for individuals to profess that they have this rest and, yet, fall as he says, according to the same example of disobedience.

“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest.”

The fact that he says, “We who have believed are entering,” and then, he says, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest,” indicates that this is a rest that lies in the future. This is the kingdom rest that he’s talking about; to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. Fall, fall away by apostasy and lose that rest that they are professing that they have. I say apostasy. We’ll talk about that later on. I can defend that, I think. But I’m not going to try to do it now; it would take too long to do it. Some people think of that as simply falling away to untruthfulness. But I think I’ll be able to show you that there is a whole lot of evidence that indicates that he means falling away to “loss-ness” before the Lord God. But let me go on.

“For the word of God is living and powerful.”

You know, when we talk about the word of God, we are talking not about the word of Plato. We’re not talking about a political leader. We’re not talking about a Reagan or a Bush. And we’re certainly not talking about a Clinton. That’s the only tip that I will give you, how I feel about those people. [Laughter] But you know that I include them all together because they are all politicians and I haven’t seen any politician who has the mantle of perfection draped over his shoulders yet. They’re all bad, in some ways, they’re all bad. George Washington, too, I throw him in as well; the same example of disobedience. The word of God, the word of God is so different. Our politicians tell us, “We’re not going to tax you; we’re going to tax those rich people. We’ll tax those people who’ve got too much money, that have been taking advantage of you, all this time. We’re not going to tax you. So, we’re just going to tax gasoline.” Now, how many of you, in this particular audience, do not have an automobile? You’ll not be taxed. You think? No. You’ll be taxed. Everybody is going to be taxed. But we heard, all before the campaign, both sides, some more than others, but both saying the same thing. “We’re not going to raise your taxes.” “We’re not going to raise your taxes.”

Now, what are they talking about? Every day, it’s some new tax that’s going to be raised. I’m not saying whether that’s right or wrong. Maybe, all of you folks who are rich should pay all of those taxes. The point I’m making is, the word of a politician is not like the word of God. The word of God is living and powerful. His word is effective. When He speaks a word, it’s a word that means something. Now, the Hebrews thought of a word that way. They didn’t think of a word like you and I think of a word. We think of a word as a sound. To them a word was a power. It wasn’t a sound. It’s what it meant that was the important thing. And much more so with God. It’s not the sound. It isn’t the fact that God speaks with a resounding sound like thunder. His voice is the sound of many waters.

Woody Allen once said that, “No one could cause a rumble in the desert like the Lord God when He spoke.” But that isn’t the point. It’s not the rumble. It’s what it really “is” in itself, because when God says something, eternal divine power stands behind it. And, it shall be done. The word of God is living. It’s not a dead promise; living and powerful. That’s what the word of God is. So when we read the word of God, we’re not reading something that’s just a sound, but it’s quick and powerful, “Sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit,” it’s penetrating. Suppose I were to hand you a sword and say, “Would you go up to Howard Prier and pierce his spirit?” You’d say, “What’s happened to you?” Let’s assume that he would say, “That’s something Dr. Johnson might say.” That’s a rather hopeless task, isn’t it? A person might say to me, “Where is his spirit? Is it in his head? In his shoulder? His body? His stomach? His legs?” What God speaks is that that “pierces” so penetratingly that it can divide between soul and spirit, something you and I could never do. The word of God! And then, he says.

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

The promises of the Bible are no dead letter. That’s a marvelous figure, “Naked and open to the eyes.” It was used of an individual in the Roman Empire, who was taking someone out to be executed, and people, who are criminals, you know, even in our society, want to turn their heads down, like this or they put something over their face or they turn away. Well, the Roman’s had an individual who took someone out like that, and they would take a sword and they would put it under the person’s chin like this, so that when he walked out to his punishment he had to look everybody in the eye, in shame. This is the word that was used. It’s something put under the neck. So the word of God is open to the eyes; “All things are open to the eyes of Him with whom we must give account.”

God’s glorious rest, in which man may participate by faith, is still available. That’s what he is saying. The human longing for peace and rest is future, and it’s given by God. It’s in the coming kingdom of God.

Our author, later on, in the 12th chapter, says this, “Wherefore we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”

So what is the exhortation? Well, there’s an imperative necessity for immediate action because, today, it’s today! If you will hear his voice! That our author speaks about.

May God cause us to respond accordingly and, remember, that there are individuals who fall, after the same example of disobedience as the children of Israel. May God bring it to pass that we, I, you, are not among them.

Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these warnings; for we surely need them. And, Lord, as we read and ponder the Scriptures, by Thy grace, work mightily in our hearts to deliver us from ourselves; from the sin principle that dwells within us, from our desires that are contrary to

“God’s Rest and Man’s Rest” by S. Lewis Johnson  
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

the word of God that do not glorify our Lord Jesus Christ, and give us great desire to be pleasing to Him and to please Him and please Thee, through submission and obedience.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.