

**Text: Heb 4.11-13**

Last week we talked about the Sabbath rest that remains, something that awaits us.

Heb 4.11 urges us to “be diligent” to enter that rest.

We’ve talked at length about this rest, what it is, how attractive it is, what the danger is of missing it.

Today I want to emphasize the final motivator our author gives us for giving extra diligence in our efforts to enter that rest.

As we do this, we will hit on a very familiar verse which is often taken out of context to address a theological topic unrelated to the theme of our passage.

Read Heb 4.11-13

Some of you have memorized verse 12, and maybe also verse 13.

What is the theological topic usually connected with this verse?

*bibliology, inspiration, doctrine of Scripture* (sometimes also in a bad misunderstanding: *anthropology* — dividing of soul and spirit)

The things taught about the Bible, about its incisive conviction and revelation concerning the human condition, these things are generally true. But in the context, our passage isn’t directly teaching these things.

Let me lay it out this way:

**What is the problem the Hebrew believers are facing?** Persecution, probably by unbelieving Jews

**What is the solution these Hebrew believers seem to be considering?** Falling back into Judaism, worshipping the same God, but without the pressure

Now, what does God think about that solution?

God is against it. He led the author of Hebrews to write against it. He is using the example of ancient Israel to warn the Hebrew Christians. God wants them to stay the course.

**Let’s fast forward to our era.**

What kinds of things cause Christians today to keep quiet about their faith?

What could cause some to fall back, to hide their faith and embrace the prevailing worldview of those around them?

To think about this, I looked up some websites talking about the experience of Christians in the Soviet bloc countries during the period of the Soviet empire.

Persecution in these countries proceeded in waves, at some times, things were harsher than others.

Overall, "At least 106,300 Russian clergymen were executed between 1937 and 1941."<sup>1</sup>

The oppression took many forms. An article on Romania sums it up:

"The state nationalized church property, severely restricted the training of priests, closed down confessional schools, and banned the teaching of religion in public schools and public religious celebrations of Easter and Christmas (Stan and Turcescu 2007: 65-66; Bărbulescu et al. 2012: 411-12). Following the Soviet model, a dedicated secret political police (the Securitate) was to enact the repression needed to achieve the party's goals. The Securitate had to penetrate the rank and file of religious groups, marginalize, compromise, and ultimately destroy the lives of politically unreliable clergymen."<sup>2</sup>

But note this statement a little further down in the article:

"Despite severe restrictions imposed on the ROC's activities, many of its leaders (bishops, metropolitans, and four of five consecutive patriarchs) collaborated with the regime; if they refused, they would be replaced with men who obeyed."<sup>3</sup>

I don't tell you this to rail on a now long dead empire. (or mostly dead!) But to ask this question again:

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<sup>1</sup> "Persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union," in *Wikipedia*, August 11, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Persecution\\_of\\_Christians\\_in\\_the\\_Soviet\\_Union&oldid=1169737600](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Soviet_Union&oldid=1169737600).

<sup>2</sup> Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan, "Church Collaboration and Resistance under Communism Revisited: The Case of Patriarch Justinian Marina (1948-1977)," *Eurostudia* 10, no. 1 (2015): 75-103, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1033883ar>.

<sup>3</sup> Turcescu and Stan.

What could cause some to fall back, to hide their faith and embrace the prevailing worldview of those around them?

Obviously, fear is the most obvious factor. Greed, personal gain, these could be motivators, too.

What does God have to say about this fear?

**Proposition:** God's word reveals what is in our hearts: faith or fear. God calls us to faith.

## I. The fall of faltering believers is a failure of faith in God's word (11)

A. "The same example of disobedience" speaks of Numbers 14 and turning back

1. The children of Israel had experienced God's redemption from Egypt
2. They heard God issue his law from Mt Sinai, they made a covenant with him
3. They received God's revelation, made the tabernacle, established God's order on their society
4. They set out on the march towards the promised land
5. They sent in a preliminary scouting party (the twelve spies)

So far, so good...

6. And then they turned back from God's word

B. The Hebrew Christians faced the "same" problem: they could fail, they could fail in the same way

1. They were facing immense challenges, sometimes even perhaps threats to their property and personal safety
2. They had little ones to think about

These are great burdens. We are in a hostile secular environment. Some people think that bringing children to church and teaching them the Bible amounts to child abuse.

And home schooling?? How dare you!

(BTW, not everyone can put their kids in a home school, that is not my point!)

## C. Modern Christians must believe that God knows all their troubles

Heb 13.5-6 *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"*<sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

1. Different context, same principle, stay faithful to God's word

2. Quotations:

a. Dt 31.6

Dt 31.6 "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

b. Ps 118.6

Ps 118.6 The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?

## II. The power of God's word motivates our diligent faithfulness (12-13)

A. Our author teaches us about the living word of God

Lit. "for living the word of God and energetic..."

1. Emphasis is on the living character of God's word

2. What is meant here by "the word"?

a. Traditionally, some took this to be like John's use, the Word = Jesus

b. In the context, we've been discussing God's word throughout (will show some references in a minute)

c. It is this word, the word God speaks that gets to the heart of our matters

3. The imagery used of the word of God here

a. Living (Ζῶν)

b. Active (ἐνεργῆς)

c. Sharper than the sharpest weapon

## B. The effectiveness of the living word of God

"With this 'living word' believers are incorporated."<sup>4</sup>

1. God's word spoke creation into existence
2. God's breath made Adam a living soul
3. God's word exposed Adam's sin
4. God's word speaks regeneration into a sinner's heart

## C. The depth God's word pierces

1. Some have used the language here as a proof text that man is a three-part being: body, soul, spirit

Not the point of the passage!

2. God's word gets right to the heart of your matter
  - a. Right into your soul (soul and spirit)
  - b. Right into your inner being (joints and marrow)
3. God's word has the ability to reveal your most hidden character: your thoughts and intents
  - a. The word of God at the border of Sinai revealed the faithlessness and fear of the Exodus generation
  - b. The word of God reveals your faith or fear when you face the same kind of fearful challenges

## D. The extent to which God's word scopes out our character (13)

1. No creature is hidden
2. All things are open and bare to Him

The tests come to our lives to prove (demonstrate) our faith.

## III. The incisive word of God is revealed in our Hebrews study so far

- A. Let us be diligent (4.11)
- B. Take care lest there be an unbelieving heart in you (3.12)

<sup>4</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 103.

- C. David: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts (3.7-8 and Ps 95.7-8; also see Ps 95.6-7)
- D. The voice of the prophets (1.1)
- E. The voice of the Son (1.2)

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** God's word reveals what is in our hearts: faith or fear. God calls us to faith.

Today we are mostly not in a place of fear. What I mean by that is we live in a free country, no one is forcing us to choose between faith or fear.

Individuals among us might be facing fearful situations. Which way will you turn? God's word will sift you and test you.

All of us must be diligent to enter God's rest. In this time, we need to

- Faithfully read and study God's word
- Faithfully attend and support God's work (the local church)
- Personally make our relationship with God the central thing in our lives

May God grant us all the grace we need to be full of faith so we can be faithful in the hour of need.