**Preparing to Teach Hebrews 4 – Perfect Rest and Perfect Priest**

I don’t know if many Chinese like lists and numbers, but judging from magazine covers that sell and the number of lists as “click bait” on the web, a lot of folks in the U.S. do like lists and numbers. So, it might be interesting to start a discussion on Hebrews 4 with a list and numbers.

**Did you know that almost one-third (30%) of the specific exhortations in Hebrews can be found in Hebrews 4? (4/13)**

1. Let us fear lest any fail to reach God’s rest (4:1)

2. Let us strive to enter that rest (4:11)

3. Let us hang onto our confession (4:14)

4. Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence (4:16)

**In case you’re asked, the full list of exhortations follows:**

1. We must pay attention (even act on) the things we hear (2:1)

2. Let us fear lest any fail to reach God’s rest (4:1)

3. Let us strive to enter that rest (4:11)

4. Let us hang onto our confession (4:14)

5. Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence (4:16)

6. Let us press on to maturity (completion of the goal) (6:1)

7. Let us enter the Holy of Holies (10:22)

8. Let us hold onto the confession of our hope (10:23)

9. Let us consider how to stimulate each other to love and accomplish good works (10:24)

10. Let’s run the race to which we’ve been called (12:1)

11. Let’s experience grace to worship and serve (12:28)

12. Let’s go to Jesus outside the camp (13:12) [like Moses did]

13. Let’s offer sacrifices of gratitude, good works, and sharing (13:15-16)

Let’s look at our outlines again and see where today’s chapter fits in:

**Absalom B. Bruce – 1899  
[Bruce, A. B. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The First Apology for Christianity: An Exegetical Study* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), p. xi.]**

1. **Christ and the Prophets (1:1-4)**
2. **Christ and the Angels (1:5-14, 2:1-4)**
3. **The Humiliation of Christ and   
   Its Rationale (2:5-18)**
4. **Christ and Moses (3:1-19)**
5. **God’s Rest (4:1-16)**

**[Bruce, F. F. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. lxiii.]**

**I. The Reality of Christianity (1:1-2:18)  
 (See last week’s slides)**

**II. The True Home of the People of God (3:1-4:13)  
 1. Jesus Greater Than Moses (3:1-6)  
 2. Second Admonition: The Rejection of Jesus More Serious  
 Than the Rejection of Moses (3:7-19)  
 3. The True Rest of God May be Forfeited (4:1-10)  
 4. Exhortation to Attain God’s Rest (4:11-13)**

**III. The High Priesthood of Jesus (4:14-6:20)  
 1. Christ’s High Priesthood, Encouragement (4:14-16)**

**[DeSilva, David A. *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 71.]**

**3:1-4:13 Second Appeal to Honor God’s Word Through Trust and Perseverance  
 3:1-6 Jesus as Son over God’s House, has greater honor than Moses,  
 the servant in God’s House.  
 3:7-4:13 Do not imitate those who rejected God’s patronage under the  
 servant Moses, for we would find ourselves similarly under  
 God’s judgment; rather, let us strive to enter the rest that  
 remains open to us.**

**4:14-10:18 Central Exposition: Long, Difficult Word  
 4:14-16 Exhortation: We have a high priest who has  
 secured and will maintain God’s favor toward  
 us, so let us draw near to God for sustaining help**

**[Geisler, Norman L. *A Popular Survey of the New Testament*   
(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), p. 256.]**

**I. Doctrinal—Christ is Better than Anything Else (Chapters 1-10)  
 A. Prophets (1:1-3)  
 B. Angels (1:4-2:18) with peril of drifting (2:1-4)  
 C. Moses (3:1-19) with peril of doubting (3:7-19)  
 D. Joshua (4:1-13)  
 E. Levitical Priests (4:14-7:28)**

**Perkins, Pheme. *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction: Third Edition* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), p. 250.]**

**Prologue: God has spoken through His Son (1:1-4)  
The Son’s superiority to the angels (1:5-14)  
Exhortation: Do not drift away from such a salvation (2:1-4)  
By suffering, the Son brings many to salvation (2:5-18)  
Jesus is greater than Moses (3:1-6)  
Exhortation: Do not fall away like Israel in the   
 wilderness (3:7-4:13)  
Jesus is the sympathetic high priest (4:14-5:10)**

Jobes, Karen H. *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic Publishing, 2011), pp. 51-53.

F. Warning Against Refusing the Ultimate Sabbath Rest (3:7-4:13)  
 1. The Failure of Moses’ generation (3:7-11)  
 2. Another Warning (3:12-15)  
 3. God Did Not Spare Moses’ generation (3:16-19)  
 4. The Sabbath of the New Covenant (4:1-11)  
 5. Warning That Nothing is Hidden from God (4:12-13)  
II. Jesus as High Priest (4:14-10:18)  
 A. Christological Claim: The Son is Our Great High Priest (4:14-5:10)  
 1. Exhortation to Approach God’s Throne with Confidence (4:14-16)

**Note that Hebrews 4:1 picks up from the last two verses of Hebrews 3 (vv. 18-19)**

*18) And to whom did He “swear that they would not enter His rest,” if not those who disobeyed? 19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief [lit. “no trust”]. 1) Therefore, while the promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear that none of you should miss it.”*   
(Hebrews 3:18-4:10 HCSB)

You can’t understand this verse without understanding the Old Testament context of “rest.”

* **Then He replied, “My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14 HCSB)**
* **When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget. (Deuteronomy 25:19 HCSB)**

Other scriptures you can have your students look up would be Deuteronomy 12:9 that tells Israel that they haven’t yet come to the resting place, the inheritance God is giving them; Joshua 1:13 where Israel is to remember the promise that God would give them rest and the land; and Joshua 21:43-45.

But to understand the idea of not “entering in” (which we also saw in Hebrews 3 when it quoted from the last part of Psalm 95), you also need to pay attention to the negative report of the spies in Numbers 13:31-33 versus the positive report of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 14:6-10. Note that without God’s intervention in v. 10, the people would have stoned them. So, a whole generation will die off because of distrust (Numbers 14:11) and disobedience (Numbers 14:43), the same things God’s people are warned against in Hebrews 3 and 4: distrust (“unfaith”) in Hebrews 3:19 and disobedience in Hebrews 4:6, 11. As a result, they would not enter in according to Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5.

OT examples of rest (guaranteed by God): Judges 3:11, 30; and 5:31. Note that it is the opposite of obeying God in these passages.

While we are still considering the idea of rest, I like where Karen H. Jobes compares Hebrews 4:3 with Jesus’ admonition to receive rest in Matthew 11:28-30. “This invitation to enter rest as the destination of one’s spiritual journey through belief in Jesus Christ is reflected in Hebrews 4:3: ‘Now we who have believed [in Christ] enter that rest.” This statement is not an invitation to idleness, spiritual or otherwise. Rather, it is a place of being where the normal routines of a right relationship with God can be established and enjoyed, because Christ has resolve the crisis of humanity’s separation from God and an eternal stability has been achieved.” (Jobes, Karen H*. Letters to the Churches: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 131)

Otto Bauerfeind (formerly of Tubingen) wrote in his article on this word that: “A true fulfilment of the task of Joshua, as Ps. 95:5-7 ff. also demonstrates, v. 8, will take a different form from the historical. Since it is from God, it will and must bring a [rest] which corresponds to that of God Himself.” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume III*, p. 637)

So, how do we succeed? We depend on God’s Word. According to F. F. Bruce, “…it is God’s ‘authentic command’ that is described as a sharp sword.” He later writes in the same discussion: “That the word of God probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light is what is meant: …” [Bruce, F. F. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 81, 82.

OR, as Franz Delitzsch wrote in the 19th century: “the word of God penetrates inquisitorially and judicially, dividing its most intimate combinations, and (what, if not expressed, is obviously implied) dissecting the whole into its several parts.” (Delitzsch, Franz. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews: Volume I* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1868), p. 213.

I particularly like the following quotes from Northrop Frye regarding Hebrews 4:12. “What it ultimately divides is the world of life from the world of death, and this can be accomplished only by a language that escapes from argument and refutation. The language used in the Bible is the language of love, …” **Frye, Northrup. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1982), p. 231**

**Finally, I tied the idea that the Tabernacle and the Temple were supposed to be patterned after God’s heavenly throne room to suggest that the throne of grace on earth was originally the mercy seat under the cherubim wings on the Ark of the Covenant. That was the top of the “box” in which the tablets of the commandments, the rod of Aaron, and a sample of manna were supposed to be located. So, when the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement, it was COVERING the Law. Now, as Hebrews will continue, Jesus is our atonement and, because of Jesus (unlike Joshua) we can confidently approach God’s throne of grace—the heavenly throne, not just a golden box in a holy place.**