

Sunday August 21st 2011
The Letter to the Hebrews
Part Thirteen

1). Heb 4:1 ¶ *Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 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. 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.*

a). We may remember that Chapter 4 of Hebrews began by drawing our attention to the fact that ‘a promise remains of entering His rest’, which is then followed by the warning, ‘let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it’.

b). In very simple terms the opportunity to enter the Rest of God remains open to all the eternally saved, but our entrance into His Rest is conditional upon how we conduct ourselves in the race of faith – and as we know all too well this conduct has to do with patient endurance, suffering and trusting God in spite of our circumstances – a process that requires consistent determination and effort, just as we see in - Heb 6:12 *that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

c). And just as we see in - Ro 8:17 ¶ *and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

d). And the possibility remains of course that we may be judged to have ‘come short of it’, to have failed to reach the mark, to be found unfaithful, when we appear before Christ at His Judgment Seat.

e). But we will also remember in conjunction with this that our ‘coming short’ of His rest is in no sense a lottery, but it is rather, as we have already said, dependent upon how we conduct ourselves in the race of faith. This is not then a matter of chance but a reality that we hold in the palm of our hand that we may either cling to or let slip, but whichever it would be is entirely of our own choosing Heb 4:11 ¶ *Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*

f). And of course the example of disobedience that we may follow is that given by the first generation of Israel to come out of Egypt – those who had the ‘gospel’ preached to them, just as we have. However, the preaching of the good

news concerning God's Rest didn't profit them because it was not mixed with faith.

g). And we will remember that the first generation of Israel heard the word; that God's promise concerning His rest was thoroughly and forcefully presented to them. But the word did not produce a return in their lives; there was no profit, because of that which was lacking on their part – faith.

h). Their lives, the way they lived, how they viewed the world should have been governed by that which God had said, but they willfully chose not to believe God, not to exercise faith, to live in disobedience, because they enjoyed the present pleasures of sin, doing things their way rather than God's way, more than they looked for the future hope of God's Rest.

i). And for ourselves we will realize that what we have heard concerning the coming Kingdom of Christ must be united together with the way we live. We cannot compartmentalize our lives so that some parts of it remain separate from that which the scriptures teach. If we have believed God with respect to the Kingdom, if we have faith, then every aspect of our lives on every occasion will be governed by that which God has said. And in so doing we will profit from it – and as a result, in that Day, we will enter His Rest.

2). Heb 4:4 *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"; 5 and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest." 6 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, 7 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."*

a). We will also remember from our previous study that God's Rest is not a reference to a celestial hammock, but rather to a very specific period of time, a period of time that is set in foundation in Genesis through the setting aside of the 7th Day.

b). This is a Day, in foundation, for which a Man was created and a Woman made in order for them to rule over the earth together pointing to the future Day when the Second Man will rule with His Bride over the earth during the Millennial Kingdom – 2Pe 3:8 ¶ *But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

c). It is then the coming of this period of 1000 years, the 7th Day, after 6 days, 6000 years of work, that is the Rest that still remains.

d). What is set side by side for us here in contrast with each other is God's way and Man's way – faith and disobedience. Israel did not enter His Rest because they chose the way of the man of flesh; they chose disobedience rather than faith.

e). And that which we have previously learned concerning this is well worth repeating – Israel’s actions can in no sense be attributed to ignorance as they had been thoroughly and forcefully presented with the word of truth, but was rather a deliberate and intentional choice not to believe that which God had said.

f). And it is important for us to realize this because the warning is that we could also ‘fall according to the same example of disobedience’. And again, this would not be through our ignorance as we have been thoroughly and forcefully presented with the word of truth also, but through a deliberate and intentional choice to reject that which God has said in favor of our own wisdom or the wisdom of man in a more general sense - 1Co 3:19 *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness";*

g). Now, it is true that some of us will be just coming into an understanding of the Word of the Kingdom, whereas others will have been subject to it for a great deal longer – but at whatever place we find ourselves we still have the choice to faithful obedience within the parameters of that which we have understood – Php 3:16 *Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.*

h). You see it always comes back to the same place for us – it is not a question of how much or how little do we know, but do we trust God enough to put into practice that which we do know? And we should not see it as an advantage to know very little as we are exhorted to go on to maturity. We are supposed to make the transition from milk to meat, to strong meat, but here is the point – not matter where we are on the road to maturity God allows us the opportunity and the privilege to respond to Him in faith; and whenever we respond to Him in faith, this is a good work, this is what makes our wedding garment, this is what brings us one step closer to entering His Rest.

3). Heb 4:12 *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. 13 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.*

a). Now as we look at verse 12 let’s remember that which has been our exhortation so often in previous weeks - "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."

b). The ‘word of God’ both in the person of Jesus Christ and in the scriptures that contain Him is the most glorious provision that we have towards the saving of our soul, but we must be able to hear His voice, in order to receive that which He has said if that provision is to be ours.

c). The word of God is 'alive' and is actively alive in the sense of being constantly active, always working, and this constant activity will be on the behalf of those who hear His voice. And we are told that this Word is sharper than any two edged sword and contained in the word 'sharper' is the idea of being able to slice through with ease – like a knife through butter would give us some idea.

d). And this Word is 'piercing even to the division of soul and spirit'. Now we have just read the words that describe the power of the Word and its ability to penetrate to the very core of our being, described in the piercing of joints and marrow. But do we realize that this is the same Word that created the universe and raised Jesus from the dead? It is this Word that is constantly active on our behalf. Can we begin to get a sense of what God has provided for us here? Can we perhaps begin to comprehend the enormity of the work that this Word can accomplish in us if we receive it with meekness? And can we also begin to see the tragedy that we would bring upon ourselves by hardening our hearts with the evil of unbelief thereby preventing the Word of God from working in us?

e). Then as we think about this Word penetrating our soul we will realize that this happens as a result of our embracing the Word, and it is the Power of the Word alone that can bring death to the man of flesh - Ro 8:13 *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

f). Col 2:11 *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,*

g). We must then continually and consistently receive the Word of God so that through the power of the Word the man of flesh may be put to death.

h). The Word of God is also described as a 'two edged sword' that also penetrates our spirit – to the soul, to that which is in constant opposition to God the Word can bring death, but to our spirit, that which is in harmony with God, our inner man, that same Word is a giver of life.

i). We read this in - 2Co 4:16 *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

j). And the prayer we have prayed from Ephesians - Eph 3:16 *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,*

j). And we will remember that which Jesus said in - Joh 6:63 *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

k). Then as we think about this we will realize that the death of the man of flesh and the strengthening of the inner man are interdependent. The more we die to self the stronger our inner man becomes and the stronger our inner man becomes

the more we are able to die to self. But whichever way we look at it we are totally dependent upon the Word of God to bring this about. This is the very reason then why we are exhorted in James - Jas 1:21 *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

l). It is only through death that our soul can have life in the age to come.

m). Mt 16:25 *"For whoever desires to save his life [soul] will lose it, but whoever loses his life [soul] for My sake will find it.*

n). And alongside this deep penetration into the very core of our being the Word is also described as 'a discerner of the thoughts and intent of the heart'. The word translated 'discerner' here has the idea of sifting out and analyzing evidence for the purpose of judgment.

o). And that which is sifted through are the thoughts and intents of our heart – that which we conceive and think about that provides the motivation for our actions – perhaps right here we can see the need for the renewing of our mind, so that our thoughts and therefore our intentions are governed by the Word of God – Ro 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

p). Perhaps this is why David writes - Ps 119:9 ¶ BETH. *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. 10 ¶ With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! 11 ¶ Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!*

4). Our scripture from Chapter 4 then continues - Heb 4:13 *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.*

a). And this verse must be seen in conjunction with and providing additional commentary on the penetrating work of the Word from the previous verse.

b). There is then no 'creature', no created thing 'hidden from His sight' – which contextually would have to be the eternally saved, therefore us, although in a broader sense it would also encompass the eternally lost and angels. We are not hidden from His sight in any circumstance, for any reason, at any time. And it is not just us in a physical sense, but given the preceding verses we would conclude that the 'all things' that are 'naked and open' would also include the thoughts and intent of our hearts.

c). The word translated here as 'open' has its root in a word that means neck or throat and its use has to do with the bending back of the head to expose the throat of the sacrificial victim to the knife. And this somewhat vivid description presents a powerful illustration of the total exposure of the human heart to the sight

of God, whose Word is sharper than any two edged sword. Perhaps in this we can see the full extent of that which is recorded at the beginning of Romans Chapter 12
Ro 12:1 ¶ *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

d). Now this is by no mean a negative thing as it is the very means by which we may come face to face with the sin that so easily ensnares us, so that we may do what is necessary to deal with it. God does not expose our sin in order to condemn us, but rather to enable us to escape from its bondage that we may fulfill God's purpose for us - Ro 6:22 *But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting [age lasting] life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

e). All of this of course presupposes a willingness on our part to allow the Word of God to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but what if we should harden our hearts? What if we should refuse to be a living sacrifice?

f). Well, let's remember the end of Hebrews 4:13 - *all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

g). There will be a reckoning, we will give an account before the Lord, we know what the scripture teaches - 2Co 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

h). Therefore we can see this action of the Word as described in Hebrews 4:12-13 as something that can happen now in our present that we may obtain grace and mercy or something, if we don't allow it in the present, that will happen at the Judgment Seat which will result in condemnation.

i). We might remember the description of Christ from the opening chapter of Revelation - Re 1:12 *Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.*

j). The eyes that are like a flame of fire and the sharp two-edged sword will at this moment in His presence search to the very core of our being. However, for

those who have allowed the work of that sharp two-edged sword to prepare them for this moment there is the promise of comfort – ‘Do not be afraid...’.

5). Heb 4:14 *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

a). As we read these next three verses we must see them in conjunction with what has just gone before.

b). The previous verse had dealt with the penetrating work of the Word and the total exposure of the human heart to the eyes of God. Inevitably such exposure must of necessity reveal the depth of depravity that exists in our sin nature. Having seen this it could be that we may become discouraged – who amongst us has not felt miserable at the sight of our sin, again and again? Who amongst us has not struggled and struggled only to fall again to the same thing?

c). But, our verses here are a source of enormous encouragement in the face of our own wickedness. V14 begins by telling us that we have not just a High Priest, but a great High Priest, and this High Priest is no less a person than the second person of the Trinity, ‘Jesus the Son of God’.

d). Now the reference to the High Priest must immediately take us to the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the function of the High Priest with regards to the sin of the eternally saved.

e). As we consider this let’s remember something about the Tabernacle in the wilderness - Ex 25:40 *"And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.*

f). Heb 8:1 ¶ *Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.*

g). The tabernacle in the wilderness was just a pattern of the true Tabernacle in the third heaven which the Lord erected and it is to this Tabernacle that Jesus has gone as our High Priest.

h). And it is not an insignificant detail that is recorded in the words - *a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens.*

i). In passing ‘through the heavens’ we have a wonderful picture of the progress of the High Priest from the altar of sacrifice in the outer court of the Tabernacle into the presence of God before the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies.

j). Perhaps a diagram would help us with this –

6). Not only this, but in passing through the heavens, our Lord passed through the heavenly realm occupied by Satan and his fallen angels. Now this may seem obvious and insignificant, but we might remember from the Book of Daniel that the fallen angels were able to bring interference to the messengers of God – Da 10:13 *"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.*

a). But there was no such interference for our Lord, in fact quite the contrary Col 2:15 *Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*

b). Disarmed = Greek – ‘apekduomai’, *ap-ek-doo'-om-ahee* = wholly strip off and separate from oneself.

c). There was then absolutely no point of contact, no place of commonality between the Lord and the principalities and powers. In fact in His total victory, His ‘triumphing over them’ they were shown to all to be impotent against Him.

d). What might we conclude then? If we follow the example of Christ the principalities and powers are impotent to prevent our exaltation with our exalted Lord.

e). Then as we remember from earlier in Hebrews - Heb 2:9 *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, might taste death for everyone.*

f). We will realize that the risen Christ is no longer a little lower than the angels, but instead is crowned with glory and honor having made a complete and irreversible separation between Himself and the original rulers of the earth.

g). And then in His role as the great High Priest, having disarmed principalities and powers, His ministry is to the many sons who will be brought to glory that through their faithful obedience they might also pass through the heavens, receiving the salvation of their souls thereby bringing an irrevocable and complete separation between themselves and those who through deception had sought to overthrow them.

h). Therefore we may with all confidence hold fast our confession – what God has said God will do and the forerunner has already entered in behind the veil making a living way for those who will follow.

i). Not only this, but our great High Priest who has disarmed principalities and powers, who is seated at the Father's right hand, who is Jesus the Son of God is neither remote nor unapproachable - Heb 4:15 *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

j). As we have seen in past weeks our Lord, in the form and likeness of a man, has experienced firsthand the anguish and the struggle that accompanies trial and temptation and therefore He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses – He was ‘in all points tempted as we are’, with all that implies, but the temptation He endured never gave way to sin.

k). Can you connect this with the sharp two-edged sword that is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart?

l). The Word of God exposes our sin and our weaknesses, yet because He is filled with compassion for us and understands what we wrestle with we do not need to try to hide from Him, something that is pointless anyway, but rather – Heb 4:16 *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

m). Just how incredible and awesome is this? In the midst of our sin we may go boldly to the throne of grace and find mercy through forgiveness as His own blood is on the Mercy Seat – and then in the midst of our temptation we may go boldly to the throne of grace where we can find grace to help in time of need – the grace to patiently endure, the grace to suffer, the grace to continue in the race, the grace not to give in.

n). And all this we must embrace as an act of faith or reject through the hardening of our heart through the evil of unbelief.

o). And so to conclude for today we come face to face again with the age old question of will we trust God or not? Will we believe, and therefore act, to the saving of the soul or will we turn back to perdition through the evil of unbelief?