

Hebrews

Chapter 4

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest,”” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” 6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

4:1 *the promise of entering his rest still stands.* Salvation is still available. “His rest” cannot refer ultimately to the rest in Canaan offered to the Israelites. That temporary, earthly rest gained under a rest that is spiritual and eternal. (CSB)

God’s promise of forgiveness and peace remains true and can be lost only if we refuse it. (TLSB)

The key word in this section is “rest.” Eight times the author uses it, in addition to the special word “Sabbath-rest.” That rest of which he writes must be important. The eternal rest awaiting all believers in Christ in heaven is all-important, so that the author’s pastoral heart reaches out in urgent warning to his readers. (PBC)

let us fear...have failed to reach it – He wanted not a single one of them to miss out on the heavenly rest into which God Himself entered when He had finished His work of creation and toward which the entry of Israel into Canaan under Joshua. (PBC)

let us fear. We should carefully watch that our trust is in the promise of God rather than in human understanding. (TLSB)

4:2 *good news.* The promise of rest, to the people of Israel through the gift of the land, and to the Church with the gift of new life in Christ. (TLSB)

did not benefit them – We should not resemble the Israelites in their unbelief in the Word of God, as the writer wishes to emphasize: For indeed we, as also they, have had a Gospel preached to us, but the Word of their hearing did not profit them, because it was not thoroughly mixed with faith in those that heard it. The promise of God even to the children of Israel did not merely embrace the promise of the possession of Canaan, but also that of the blessings of the Messiah.

The redeeming grace and favor of God had been proclaimed to them at various times; the promise given to Abraham that in him and in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed was their precious heritage, whose significance was also understood by their teachers. But all this glorious proclamation did them no good. They heard it, indeed, it was passed on from father to son, but it was not mixed with faith in their hearts, they did not place their hope of salvation in its gracious promises, and so it really profited them nothing. The fault thus lay not with God, for He had provided for the proclamation of the Gospel-message, but with themselves; they lost the blessings of the promise by their unbelief, Hos. 13, 9. (Kretzmann)

united by faith – faith is not a matter of ears only, but of the heart. The gospel message, when it beats on the eardrums only, leads to no eternal rest. Faith is required, the author reminds us, using for the first time this word which is also a favorite of his. Israel lost the promised rest because of the lack of faith. Must not our constant prayer as we hear that precious gospel be, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark9:24)? (PBC)

By faith, we receive the promises of God and become members of His household (3:2). Trusting in God’s promise, we receive the gifts that God gives. Luth: “These three—faith, the Word, and the heart—become one. Faith is the glue or the bond. The Word is on one side; the heart is on the other side. But through faith they become one spirit, just as man and wife become ‘one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24). Therefore it is true that the heart is combined with the Word through faith and that the Word is combined with the heart through the same faith” (AE 29:160). (TLSB)

4:3 *we who have believed enter that rest.* Just as entering physical rest in Canaan demanded faith in God’s promise, so salvation-rest is entered only by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. (CSB)

Prefigured by the promise of a new life for God’s people in the Promised Land. This promise is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, who gives us an eternal home and rest. (TLSB)

his works were finished from the foundation of the world. God rested from his work on the seventh day of creation (see v. 4; Ge 2:2), and thus his rest is already a reality. The rest God calls us to enter (vv. 10–11) is not our rest but his rest, which he invites us to share. (CSB)

Focuses on God’s seventh day of creation. As God’s rest has existed from the foundation of the world, so His people throughout time have been free to enter this rest and peace. (TLSB)

4:4 *God rested on the seventh day* – God’s rest on the seventh day was the rest that follows finished and holy work, a rest characterized by perfect contentment and infinite satisfaction. It is this rest, this eternal blessedness and total fulfillment, that He wants to share with His children. Each of those six days of creation had an ending as well as a beginning, but of the day of rest this is not stated. Of course, that seventh day also had to be a twenty-four hour day as the others, but the rest it symbolized has no ending. The beauty of it is that he not only invites, but His grace through word and sacrament produces in us the faith necessary for entrance into that eternal rest. (PBC)

4:5 *shall not enter my rest* – Cites Ps 95:11, which speaks of God’s judgment because of His people’s refusal to enter the Promised Land. Cf Nu 16. (TLSB)

4:6–8 Israel’s going into Canaan under Joshua was a partial and temporary entering of God’s rest. That, however, was not the end of entering, as shown in the continuing invitation of Ps 95:7–8. (CSB)

4:6 He now applies the argument by admonishing the Hebrews. (TLSB)

some to enter it – In Is. 40:8 of his book Isaiah declared, “The word of our God stands forever,” and in Matthew 24:35 Jesus repeated the thought, “My words will never pass away.” God’s word is always sure. He promised rest; His promise still stands even though Israel lost the rest; His promise will be fulfilled in others entering that rest. (PBC)

4:7 *Today, if you hear his voice.* The “today” in which God offered His rest did not end with the sad incident in the desert. A long time later, over 400 years in fact, we hear Him offering His rest to the Israel of David’s time. Nor did His “today” end with them. To Hebrew Christians reading His words centuries later, to all who read them today, He still speaks. The present is God’s “today” for us. Only He knows how long it will last. Through the word His voice speaks to us proclaiming the gospel and offering His rest in more glorious form than Israel ever heard it. (PBC)

4:8 *if Joshua had given them rest.* Eventually, God’s people possessed the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, but the ultimate rest was with the second Joshua, Jesus, who saves His people from their sin. (TLSB)

In the Greek the names Joshua and Jesus are the same; the context must help determine which one is meant. What a thought! The first “Joshua” could not lead them into God’s true peace, but there was another one who could and did, with His life-blood as the price. (PBC)

4:9 *There remains a Sabbath-rest.* † God’s rest may still be entered through faith in his Son. (CSB)

God has fully completed the six days of His work in creation; thus, His Sabbath rest extends throughout time. In Christ, God’s people enter into God’s day of rest and experience the peace He gives. (TLSB)

Relief for weary souls is found in the Sabbath-rest. The Son Himself provides that rest (Mt. 11:28). We attain that rest through faith in God’s Son. He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mk. 2:28) because He is both the agent of creation before the first Sabbath, and the author of our salvation (Heb. 2:10; cf. 12:2). The connection between creation-rest and salvation-rest is apparent in the two formulations of the Third Commandment. Ex 20:8-11 bases the Sabbath on God’s creation, while Deut 5:12-15 bases it on God’s redemption of His people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

For us in the NT the picture is even clearer. Those Sabbath days were, as Colossians 2:17 points out, “a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” In Christ, shadow has become reality. Through His death and resurrection the way to God’s eternal rest is fully built and opened wide. What we need now are not OT Sabbath days, but a faith in Christ, “that will not shrink though pressed by many a foe.” (PBC)

4:10 *rested from his works.* Whereas God rested from the work of creation, the believer ceases his efforts to gain salvation by his own works and rests in the finished work of Christ on the

cross. According to some, however, the believer's final rest is in view here (see Rev 14:13). (CSB)

Enjoying the result of God's completed work. The benefits of Christ's completed work, received by faith, are distributed in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. (TLSB)

Rest is important to God – and to us. The child of God must put aside any attempts to gain salvation through His labors. Even now we rest from such futile striving. A great burden has been taken off our backs. We rest on the Sabbath to praise God for giving to us our eternal salvation in Christ. By His promise, we will finally enter eternal rest and cease our labor (Rev. 14:13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

Rest implies cessation from work, a laying down of that which tires. So also with the heavenly rest which Christ brings and to which He leads. "Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work," the author reminds us. Before faith, man seeks to work out his own salvation. (PBC)

4:11 *strive to enter that effort.*† Not a call to earn one's salvation by works, but an exhortation to enter salvation-rest through faith and not follow Israel's sad example in the desert. (CSB)

We do this in two ways: (1) by daily returning to our Baptism, renouncing the devil and all evil; (2) by trusting God's mercy in Christ, who has prepared our eternal rest in heaven (Jn 14:2). (TLSB)

This does not contradict the fact that we enter not through our own efforts, but through faith in God's promise. Other passages that use the verb for Christian striving include Gal. 2:10; Eph. 4:3; 2 Peter 1:10, 15; 3:14. Our effort is not to gain salvation, but to live and act in faith and obedience in accord with God's Word, so that we may enter the promised rest. Grace alone and faith alone do not negate the urgency of good works, but affirm that works will follow and result from faith. "Make every effort" contrasts with the example of the slothful Israelites, who complained in the desert, indulged in idolatry, and longed to return to a life of ease in Egypt. God swore that they would not enter His rest (Ps. 95:11). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

After salvation, the believer still labors. He spends himself in living service to the One who loved him and gave Himself for him. Of that service we never grow weary, though we often weary in it. (PBC)

4:12–13 The reasons for giving serious attention to the exhortation of v. 11. (CSB)

4:12 *word of God.* God's truth was revealed by Jesus (the incarnate Word; see Jn 1:1, 14), but it has also been given verbally, the word referred to here. This dynamic word of God, active in accomplishing God's purposes, appears in both the OT and the NT (see Ps 107:20; 147:18; Isa 40:8; 55:11; Gal 3:8; Eph 5:26; Jas 1:18; 1Pe 1:23). The author of Hebrews describes it as a living power that judges as with an all-seeing eye, penetrating a person's innermost being. (CSB)

The Word remains forever and always accomplishes the work that it is sent to do (see note, Is 55:11). The person striving (v 11) will be helped by the Word. (TLSB)
It contains Law and Gospel, and works judgment and salvation: those who believe the Word will enter rest, while those who reject and disobey it will not. The living Word became incarnate (Jn

1:1, 14). We see the Word in action in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

The word does things. It is not passive or outmoded, but always up-to-date and effective as God Himself said in Isaiah 55:11, “It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (PBC)

living. First descriptor for the sake of emphasis. God’s Word gives life. (TLSB)

active. Or, effective. (TLSB)

sharper than any two-edged sword. Even the sharpest sword can cut only through flesh and bone; God’s Word cuts through any spiritual barriers that stand between human beings and God. (TLSB)

soul and spirit, joints and marrow. The totality and depth of one’s being. (CSB)

God’s Word cuts to the innermost part of a human being. (TLSB)

The short sword carried by the Roman legionary was sharp and with its double edge could cut in any direction. But God’s word is far sharper and with its cutting edges can divide even the indivisible. Who can tell where soul and spirit touch or divide? Yet God’s word slices the two as easily as a sharp scissors glides through thin cloth. (PBC)

discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart – So deeply the word penetrates into man’s innermost being, exposing his most secret parts. The people who heard Peter’s sermon on Pentecost knew about the penetrating action of this double-edged sword. Acts 2:37 tells us, “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?” (PBC)

God’s Word exposes the true state of a person’s heart before God. The comparison to a sword emphasizes God’s work in our lives through the Law, in keeping with the exhortation in 3:13. Luther: “Christ’s Word breaks through and wounds. It takes away every ground of trust and ascribes redemption solely to the blood of Christ; it pricks and wounds the soul. This is a health-bestowing wound, for these weapons kill in order to make alive.... It is, however, a fall that is happy and full of consolation, demonstrating the power and success of the Word” (AE 12:225). (TLSB)

4:13 *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight*. The author associates the activity of the word with the activity of God as though they are one and the same—which in a sense they are. (CSB)

Image is of a sacrificial animal prepared for slaughter. Before the power of God’s Word we have no defense. Unless God has mercy, we will die. (TLSB)

The penetrating Word is powerful because the Word is God (Jn. 1:1). Through the Word made flesh, God reconciled the world to Himself. That is another way of saying that we are at peace with God; we are at rest with the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

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we must give account. In all our thoughts, words, and deeds, we are accountable to God, the eternal Judge who sees all (cf Rm 14:10–12). (TLSB)

3:7–4:13 God's people missed rest in the Promised Land through their unbelief. This is a warning to us. God calls us to trust Him and to enter into the rest that He has enjoyed since the completion of creation. In Christ Jesus, we have rest from the accusation of the Law. The Holy Spirit leads us to trust in Christ, granting us everlasting peace. • Lord Jesus, You are my rest. May I always look to You when I am weary and afraid. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

4:14–7:28 An exposition of Ps 110:4, stressing Christ's superiority over Aaron because of a better priesthood. (CSB)

4:14-16 Heb 4:1–13 speaks of the sure hope Christians have of entering God's eternal Sabbath-rest through the sacrifice of our great high priest, Jesus. As we keep before us our ultimate goal of eternal life, we must beware of falling prey to the same kind of disobedience that Israel did. In 4:12–13, the author warns us not to attempt to fool God or hide from him. The word of God is like a double-edged sword, piercing right to the center of our heart, mind, and soul, discerning our true attitudes and desires. Nothing is hidden from God. This raises the question to be answered in our text: How dare we approach the throne of God? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Heb 5:1–6 describes how the high priest in the temple was required to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as the sins of the people. However, Jesus, our great high priest, only offered one sacrifice, and that for our sins, because he is the sinless Son of God. Jesus' perfect sacrifice need never be repeated because it completely atoned for the sin of the whole world. The reference in Heb 5:7–9 to Jesus "offering up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears" likely alludes to his agony in the garden of Gethsemane as well as other fervent prayers during his ministry. In the garden, Jesus endured untold torment as he contemplated drinking the cup of suffering filled with our sin and shame. But because he did so on the cross, Jesus "became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him," that is, to all who respond to him with the obedience of faith (5:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

4:14 *great high priest.* See 2:17; 3:1. The author here begins an extended discussion of the superior priesthood of Christ. (CSB)

The only One who can truly represent us to the Father, and who can truly represent the Father to us. (TLSB)

“High Priest” is a term which only the book of Hebrews applies to Jesus Christ. In fact, the thought of his high priesthood forms the ventral theme of this book. The author has been moving toward this important concept since the beginning of his book, as he hints in 2:17 and 3:1 have indicated. Now he leads us to closer contact with this theme, though we must wait till chapters 7, 8 and 9 for a fuller treatment. (PBC)

The priesthood was basic to Judaism. Every Jew was familiar with the concept of the priests who officiated at the Jerusalem temple and of the high priest, who led them in their service. Never was it said of any OT high priest that he was “great,” not even of Aaron the first one. (PBC)

through the heavens. As the Aaronic high priest on the Day of Atonement passed from the sight of the people into the Most Holy Place (see Lev 16:15, 17), so Jesus passed from the sight of his watching disciples, ascending through the heavens into the heavenly sanctuary, his work of atonement accomplished (Ac 1:9–11). (CSB)

Bridged the otherwise infinite gap between God and humanity. (TLSB)

hold fast our confession. Suggests that the readers were in danger of letting their faith slip (see similar admonitions in 2:1; 3:6, 14). (CSB)

Cling to Christ in faith since He has already demonstrated His power. (TLSB)

our confession. “The apostle tells us to come to God, not with confidence in our own merits, but with confidence in Christ as the High Priest. The apostle requires faith.... [Also,] Peter says we receive forgiveness of sins through Christ’s name, that is, for His sake. It is not for the sake of our merits, not for the sake of our contrition, attrition, love, worship, or works. (TLSB)

Hold firmly (kratōmen, v 14): The verb *krateō* here as in 6:18 means “hold fast (to) someone or something, and hence remain closely united to it or him” (BAGD 448b). Our text urges us to keep on clinging tenaciously to the true Christian confession. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

Faith we profess (homologia, v 14): The verb *homologeō* can mean “to promise,” “agree,” “declare publicly, acknowledge,” or “confess, make a confession.” Here the noun (*homologia*) refers to the Christian’s confession of faith, a solemn declaration of faith on which the church agrees, as in 3:1; 10:23; 1 Tim 6:12–13. It was in this sense of the word that the Reformers called the documents in the Book of Concord *confessions*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

4:15 *to sympathize - Sympathize (sumpatheō, v 15):* The verb literally means “have the same feelings or emotions together with someone else.” In this literal sense, “to sympathize” can mean “to suffer with someone in their time of trial.” It includes sharing the same pathos or feeling because of having shared a similar experience. It is stronger than the word *empathize*, which denotes identifying with another and understanding their experiences, but which does not necessarily involve actually experiencing the same problems. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

tempted as we are. See 2:18. The author stresses the parallel between Christ’s temptations and ours. He did not have each temptation we have but experienced every kind of temptation a person can have. (CSB)

Cf Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–13 for accounts of Jesus’ temptation. (TLSB)

From the beginning to the end of that earthly stay Jesus faced temptations more severe than we shall ever know. He felt the full pressure and pull as all the troops in hell’s barracks with all the weapons from hell’s arsenals stormed against Him. He felt those temptations even more than we do because while we so often fall under temptation’s first round, He remained standing to receive every assault. (PBC)

Tempted (*pepeirasmēnon*, v 15): The verb *peirazō* can mean “to try, put to the test,” or “entice to sin, tempt,” as it does here and in 2:18, and in the gospel accounts of Jesus being tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1 and parallels). The devil is sometimes called *ho peirazō*, “the tempter,” because he tempted Jesus (Matt 4:3) just as he tempts people (1 Thess 3:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

yet was without sin. The way in which Christ’s temptations were completely different from ours was in the results—his temptations never led to sin (see Mt 4:1–11). (CSB)

Jesus did not succumb to the temptation He experienced but remained wholly faithful to His Father. (TLSB)

4:16 *Let us then...draw near.* Because Christ our high priest has experienced human temptation, he stands ready to give immediate and sympathetic help when we are tempted. (CSB)

with confidence - Confidence (*parrēsia*, v 16): In the Hellenistic world this word signified the privilege to approach high officials boldly, with freedom to say anything in frankness and candor without fear of penalty. We can approach God’s throne of grace with even more confidence, knowing that Christ has removed the threat of God’s punishment and guaranteed that we will receive mercy and grace in our time of need. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

the throne of grace. Where sacrifice was offered on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16:2–3). On the cross, Christ offered the final sacrifice. Those who place their trust in Christ, rather than fleeing from God, can come to Him expecting mercy, healing, and life. “Those who cling to God alone should be sure that He will show them mercy. In other words, He will show them pure goodness and blessing, not only for themselves, but also to their children and their children’s children, even to the thousandth generation and beyond that. This ought certainly to move and impel us to risk our hearts in all confidence with God [Hebrews 4:16; 10:19–23], if we wish all temporal and eternal good. For the supreme Majesty makes such outstanding offers and presents such heartfelt encouragements and such rich promises” (LC I 39–40). “God desires nothing more seriously from us than that we ask Him for much and great things. In fact, He is angry if we do not ask and pray confidently” (LC III 56–57). (TLSB)

receive mercy and find grace. Those who trust in Christ receive God’s forgiveness and strength to lead a holy life. Luther: “Jesus Christ is our mediator, our throne of grace, and our bishop before God in heaven, who daily intercedes for us and reconciles all who believe in him alone, and who call upon him; that he is not a judge, nor cruel, except for those who do not believe in him, or who reject his comfort and grace; [and] that he is not the man who accuses and threatens us, but rather the man who reconciles us [with God], and intercedes for us with his own death and blood shed for us so that we should not fear him, but approach him with all assurance

and call him dear Savior, sweet Comforter, faithful bishop of our souls, etc.” (AE 50:20–21). (TLSB)

His is a throne from which emanates grace, drawing sinners. It overflows with mercy that forgives, because the one seated on it is full of grace and mercy. There is no need He cannot satisfy, no transgression that has not been covered by His blood. The time to approach His throne of grace is whenever temptation strikes, whenever your conscience troubles you and whenever you desire rest. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

It is God’s throne we can approach, the seat of His infinite majesty and holy justice. Before this throne of splendor sinners shrink back in terror and stand mute in guilt. But with Christ our great high priest standing there, it becomes a “throne of grace” where believers “receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (PBC)

In the nick of time, right when we need it, when our temptations come, we’ll find what we need from Him who knows just how to give it. We’ll receive mercy there, God’s love that looks at and offers help to believers overwhelmed by their own weaknesses. Grace will also be there, God’s love, wholly underserved, which pardons the guilty. To such a throne of grace we come boldly confessing sin and receiving forgiveness, pouring out sorrow and being comforted, laying down weaknesses and being strengthened, asking questions and being answered. (PBC)