**ENTER GOD’S REST**

January 31, 2016

Hebrews 3:7-4:13

Key Verse 4:11 “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.”

Have you heard about “FOMO”? It is fear of missing out. It is anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on a social media website. People are anxious that they are missing out fun or important events, and suffer from anxiety. They have no rest in their soul. People are anxious, frustrated, nervous, fearful and desperate. They feel they are "missing out" on the seemingly perfect lives that others portray through social media. They feel worried, jealous and anxious after finding out they had been left out of a gathering through pictures or status updates on social media.

But we know that many things in facebook are fake, but we are deceived by our sinful desire. We are deceived into thinking that they are real. Essena O’Neill, 19, has more than 600,000 followers on Instagram and 260,000 on YouTube. She confessed that her pictures are fake. She said, “Not real life — took over 100 in similar poses trying to make my stomach look good. Would have hardly eaten that day. Would have yelled at my little sister to keep taking them until I was somewhat proud of this. I have created an image of myself that I think others feel is unattainable, others look at as some type of ‘perfect human.’” She has deleted many of her original photos and re-captioned others with more honest descriptions. She has also changed her @essenaoneill Instagram account name to Social Media Is Not Real Life.

Why are we restless and anxious? It is because of our unbelief. It began with Adam in the Garden of Eden. After creating all the world and man, on the seventh day God rested from all his works. God said, “It is done, I have made a wonderful world for man and I have given him a wife and everything is set, and I am going to let him enjoy his relationship with me.” Adam was walking and talking with God. He was at God’s rest. He leaned on God. He had no anxieties, he had no worries, he had the complete freedom to fellowship with God while he was living in God’s rest. There was only one condition for enjoying the rest. Faith, belief. Then what happened? Satan came down and tempted Eve, saying, “If you eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” She believed Satan’s lies. Then what happened? Immediately they forfeited rest. Adam was restless. He was fearful to come out, hiding behind leaves. And he was subject to a lifetime hard labor. He had to worry about what to eat all his life.

By his grace, God provided a way for man to enter his rest. It was to send his Son Jesus Christ as a man to die for our sins and those who believe in him may have God’s rest. Now it is up to us to trust in God and believe in him. In today’s passage the author repeatedly warns us, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” We learned last week that Christ has conquered death and all the sin and pain that leads to death. In Christ Jesus all things will one day be put under my feet, and I will rule with him in glory forever and ever. What we see in Christ today will someday be our destiny. So when we hear his voice, we should fix our thoughts on Jesus. But when we see our situation, we still face many difficulties. So we are deceived into thinking that it is not true, God does not care and we should take care of ourselves. Rather than fixing our thoughts on Jesus, we fix our thoughts on ourselves and our situation. Then we become anxious and fearful.

Since Moses is already the subject of the passage in verses 1-6, the author just picks up on Moses and uses an illustration from Moses that fits in perfectly. Look at verses 7-9. “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did.” The Israelites were in the desert and were thirsty and could not find water; they felt their lives were in danger. In this situation, they should remember what God had done for them and ask for his help. Instead, they complained bitterly, out of their habit, saying, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and our livestock die of thirst?” God did not punish them right away, but graciously provided fresh water out of the rock. Moses called that place “Massah,” which means “testing,” and “Meribah,” which means “rebellion,” because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” It was the stupidest thing they could ever test God on at this point. God has just delivered them from Egypt by fantastic miracles, fantastic plagues that He brought, the opening of the Red Sea, manna in the morning every day, the cloud, the whole thing leading them through the wilderness as a people and now they say - Is God among us? Ridiculous. But you see that is the character of unbelief. It never has enough proof. You don’t need more proof about whether God is real, you don’t need more proof about whether Jesus is real. You need to commit yourself to God. That is what you need. And as long as you keep putting God to the test, you are never going to know the truth. So they had failed to believe God’s promise. God had given them enough evidence to convince anybody ten times over but they loved their sin, they loved their selfishness, they loved their own plans and their own ideas and they would not put themselves in God’s hands.

So they kept on testing God. Another event is in Numbers 14. Moses chose twelve tribal leaders to spy out the land and bring back a report. 10 spies brought back a report, and said, “We are in trouble. Those guys are giants and we are like grasshoppers.” We can call that the grasshopper complex. The grasshopper complex is that you walk by sight, and you end in defeat. They did not look at God, who is living and almighty, but only at the reality. They did not remember God’s promise and trust God. Rather, they fell into fear and despair and gave up. They wanted to return to their former lives as slaves in Egypt. Their negative reports overpowered the positive reports and captured the hearts of the people of Israel. Then the whole nation fell into fear and rebelled against God. The consequence was very serious. God was so angry that he did not allow them to enter the Promised Land. They wandered in the desert for forty years and died, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. God said, “Not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.” He said in effect, they had enough evidence to believe that I could lead them into that land and lead them into a land of glory and milk and honey but they wouldn’t believe me so they are not going to see that land.

Look at verse 7-8a again. “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” What does today mean? He uses repeatedly the word today. It is the word of urgency. Today doesn’t mean, necessarily, 24 hours, it means in the day of grace. It may mean less than 24 hours, it may mean now, this very moment. If you know the truth of Jesus Christ, if you know the gospel of Jesus Christ don’t do what Israel did when they knew God’s truth, when they saw God’s revelation, don’t harden your heart. It is so foolish. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” When D.L. Moody preached, he would say, “Go home and think about what I’ve said.” And one night, in Chicago, he said - Go home and think about what I've said, come back tomorrow night ready to make a decision. That night the Chicago fire broke out, half his congregation was dead. That was the last time he has ever told anyone to go anywhere and think about it. Now is the moment of salvation. And so the word of God says, “Do not harden your hearts but today hear his voice.” You see, salvation is a now thing. You may not have it tomorrow. Today signifies the present time of grace and men today as in the time of Hebrews and in the time of David and in the time of Moses had the privilege of hearing God’s voice as God spoke. And notice that it says, “If you hear.” Hearing God is a matter of your own will but as always there is that possibility of hardening the heart as Israel did and seeing the sad results.

As God judged the Israelites’ unbelief in the wilderness, he will judge you today. They rejected the forty years of evidence, added to the evidence they had seen in Egypt and the evidence they had seen in the Exodus and that is knowing and willful unbelief. Look at verse 12. “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” On the basis of the Israelites’ unbelief and God’s judgment, the author is saying, “Look at your own heart. Do you know the truth? Do you know the truth of Jesus Christ? In love I say to you, don’t allow yourself to harden your heart so that you have an unbelieving heart and you wind up departing from the living God.”

Look at verse 13. “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” We need to help each other to fight unbelief. That is why we have to meet together in Christian fellowship. Do you know Paul’s secret of victorious life of faith? One of the ways he had fought it was to surround himself with believers who would pray for him and exhort him. Did you know that Paul always traveled in a team? He was not a loner. There was Barnabas and Silas and Timothy and Luke and Mark and others. The one time he was forced to go off by himself to Athens his spirit was almost broken by the overwhelming evil there and he sent immediately for Timothy to join him. You might get the idea that Paul's faith (and the faith of other ministers) was never in need of human reinforcement. 2 Corinthians 7:5–7 says, “For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he told us of your longing.” Paul needed the partnership of close friends who could strengthen his faith when fear was beginning to get the upper hand in his life. We need that same partnership. We need to encourage one another to endure.

Look at verses 4:9-10. “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.” Let’s think about God’s rest in several ways: Firstly, God’s rest means no more self‑effort. No more trying to please God by your feeble, fleshly works. And the moment you enter into God’s rest works cease as a way to please God, they don’t please him anyway because you cannot do enough works to be perfect. And so rest then involves cessation from legalistic activity. It is a rest in free grace. Revelation 14:13 says, “Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,” says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’” This does not mean that we will do nothing in the Kingdom of God. We will worship and serve God in eternity, but there will be no fatigue, distress, and stress.

Secondly God’s rest means free from whatever worries or disturbs you. Some people cannot rest mentally because they are always bugged by everything. Every little thing just pounds away in their brain and they can never just rest because they are always hassled by everything. To rest means to be free from whatever hassles you, from whatever disturbs you or creates worries in your mind. It means, in this sense, to be quiet, to be still, to be peaceful, be free from guilt and the things which drive us to neurosis, psychosis etc. And so bringing that across to God’s rest we would say that to enter God’s rest simply means to be at peace with God. It means to possess the perfect peace that God gives. It means to free from guilt. It means no need to worry about sin because sin is forgiven and we're at rest all of a sudden, no more anxiety, no more pressure, no more guilt.

Thirdly, God’s rest is to remain confident, to put your trust in God that God will lead you in the best way. To enter God’s rest means to enjoy security, no more fear you have absolute trust and absolute confidence in God’s care and charge of your life. It means that we can lean on God and we can be sure that God will never fail us.

Look at verse 11. “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter into that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.” Here making effort means to work diligently. We need to work at it with intense purpose and intense concern to enter into that rest. It is not the idea that you work your way to salvation, it is the idea that you diligently seek to enter God’s rest by faith. Look at verse 12. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The word of God is the best defense against unbelief and sin’s deceitfulness. When we have doubt of God’s love, we remember God’s word, “God is good; his love endures forever.” D.L. Moody said, “The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible.” The word of God can expose the devil’s lies and our sinful desires and help us to enter God’s rest.