

Heb. 4:11-13 (part 1) The Spoken (written) Word of God

In cps. 3 & 4, the author is urging his readers to trust God's promises in the Gospel of Christ. And the fulfillment of this gospel is called "rest." It is none other than the "rest" of God Himself. And last week we saw that, as sinners, as those who cannot find rest in and of ourselves, we come to Christ who says, "**Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest**" (Matt. 11:28). This begins with our justification. On the cross, Jesus said, "**It is finished.**" In his death he took our sins upon Himself and gives us his righteousness. And in him we are called the "righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). We have peace. We no longer work to try and make ourselves right before God. And in Him, we rest. But, we also saw that this rest is future, which I believe is the author's main point. In this evil world, we are in a constant wrestling match against our own sin, against this world, and against the forces of Satan. Around us we find sickness and death and heartache and persecutions and all sorts of perils. And we look forward to our rest that awaits us in heaven (Rev. 21:1-8). And in v. 11 we read: "**Let us strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.**"

Here I believe we see the words of a pastor, particularly exhorting those Jewish believers to press on, to look unto Christ their "**great high priest**" (4:14), to "**consider their confession**" (3:1). He is warning that community, and us, "**not to harden our hearts**" (3:8). He says in 3:12: "**Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart**" and in 3:14: to "**hold our original confidence firm to the end**" and in 4:14 "**hold fast our confession.**" His desire for those readers and us is a living and active faith in the promises of God in Christ. And the author does not merely give them truths to believe, he is also practical. He reminds them (and us) of the necessity of the living and powerful Word of God. Therefore, we need this passage today. Our life, our existence, our ability to continue down the road to heaven depends on the Word of God.

Now, if you remember a couple weeks ago, I delayed this sermon because I was having a difficult time with this passage because I was unsure of the author's meaning concerning the Word of God. You might say, "*What? It's pretty simple. It's the written Word. Here it is!*" In other words, when most people read this verse, they usually think about the spoken Word, which is the written Word of God. Throughout cps. 1-3 the author emphasizes God who speaks (1:1, 5, 6, 8, 13; 2:1, 3, 12; 3:7, 15; 4:3, 4, 7, etc.). He often says, "**Listen to his voice.**" And it is true. The Bible is the voice of God. In the OT, God spoke. And God's people preserved his words in writing. And today we have his Word.

However, there are many (Church Fathers, many puritans including John Owen, and others today) who believe the "WORD" of God here is not referring primarily to the written Word, but instead to the essential word who is Christ. After all, does not John say, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" And also, "**The Word became flesh and dwelt among us**" (John 1:1, 14). And look at v. 13. He says, "**no creature is hidden from HIS sight . . .**" This is obviously God, not the written word. And this WORD (in my hand) is not "living" and "powerful," in and of itself. These words we have are living and powerful because of the ONE who gives them life and power.

Therefore, I believe the Word is BOTH, which is what this passage teaches. So, I will have two parts of this sermon: 1) The Spoken (Written) Word, and 2) The Essential Word (Christ). And I will have the same 3 truths for each part. Here they are: The Word is: 1) Living; 2) Powerful; and 3) Judging.

The Spoken (written) Word of God is:

1. Living. The word used here is (*zon*) is where we get our word zoology. It means living. When I pick up rocks to throw across the lake or see a boulder on the side of the road, they are not alive, they are dead. But when I think of an animal such as a dog or a cat that bites or scratches, they are alive; there is life. As people, we are alive in the sense that we breathe air, our organs work, our heart pumps blood throughout our body. We are physically living. And we know we live because God has given us life, along with every other living creature in this world. We did not evolve from nothing. In Paul's great sermon to the Athenians he says, "**In HIM we live and move and have our being**" (Acts 17:28). Our life comes because God Himself lives. This is a quality of his nature. Jer. 10:10: "**But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.**"

The Bible often speaks of idolatry as men and women worship wood and stones that do not live; they cannot see, they cannot speak, they cannot hear, they are not living, which is why he says in 3:12: "**Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**" This is a picture of our world. In Rom. 1:21-23 Paul says, "**For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.**" Our world seeks those things which have no life in and of themselves. The Word of God is not dead. It is alive and well.

2. Powerful. Because the Word is "living," it is also powerful. The Greek word is *energes*, which is where we get our word "energy." The Word of God does not sit idly by but works powerfully to accomplish the will of God. When God speaks, there is effectual power to accomplish what He desires. Think back to creation. God spoke, and OUT OF NOTHING the earth and the universe were created. This is power! Is. 55:11 says: "**So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**"

Notice the description of this living and powerful Word of God. V. 12: "**It is sharper than any two-edged sword . . .**" I know we don't like to think in such terms. But, which would be more effective in battle? A sword with one sharp edge, or a sword with two equally sharp edges. A double-edged sword doesn't merely cut in one direction, but in two. And then he gives another picture about how the Word of God is effective. Look at v. 12: "**piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**" Here we see the effective Word of God with power to reveal the heart. I don't want to read too much into this passage here about the separation of "spirit" and "soul." But the point is that God knows ALL. Look at v. 13: "**And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are**

naked and exposed . . .” This means that everything is laid bare before the Word of God. This means you and me, all of us, cannot hide anything from God.

One of our my favorite things to do as a kid (even our older kids now still like it) was to play hide and seek, especially in the dark. And there were times when my place was so good, no one found me and they had to give up. But, what if your brother or sister could peel the roof off the house and watch you as you hide? They would know EXACTLY where you are hidden. In the same way, the roof of our heart is always exposed to God. And practically for us NOW, God speaks to us and peers into our hearts through the written Word. It teaches us. It tells the will of God. It exposes our sins. It encourages us. Etc. (See Ps. 139:1-3).

Just this week in my daily reading I read these words from Ps. 19:7-14. Notice some of the ways the Word, here, called the “Law” of God, works powerfully in our lives. **“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”** Let’s move on.

3. Judging. We see this in the picture of the sword. A two-edged sword is effective in cutting. But, a sword is also a picture of judgment. And this is really the context of our passage. Think back for a moment about the Israelites in the wilderness. Because of unbelief in God’s promise to lead them to Canaan, God said, “This generation (except for Caleb and Joshua) will perish without seeing this land.” And what happens next. The people realize what has happened. God’s word of judgment was being fulfilled. And they say, **“Let’s go up to the land.”** And Moses reminds them, **“Why now are you transgressing the command of the Lord, when that will not succeed? Do not go up, for the Lord is not among you, lest you be struck down before your enemies . . . For you will fall by the sword.”** And what happens next. The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that part of the land defeated them and many died by the sword as they ran away to spend the next 38 years outside the land (Num. 14:20-45).

As God used the sword in the dessert in the hands of Israel’s enemies, so is his Word used for those who do not obey God’s spoken word today as it has come down to us in the Son (1:2). If you think my judgment was great in that day as they rejected me and my Word of promise in entering the land (place of rest), how much greater will my judgment be for those who do not obey my Word of promise fulfilled in the Son. Look at v. 11: **“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”**

This CONTEXT helps us understand warning passages like Heb. 6 and Heb. 10 for those who do not trust the Son. Look with me at 6:4-6: **“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy**

Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” And then look with me to Heb. 10:26-31: “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

This morning, what is your response to these words? I often pray and say, “**We believe in the power of the preached Word of God.**” Well, these words will have one of two effects on us. i: They will serve as God’s means to spur us on to more and more faithfulness, to more obedience, as we look to God’s promises by faith in the Son. As we read the Word, which is our “daily bread,” we will say with Joshua and Caleb said, “*Let us go up.*” “*God is right.*” “*God is good!*” (They are bread to us!) “*Let us trust God’s Word of promise.*” And though this life is short and full of troubles, the Word will serve us as the most beautiful means of grace and will fill our hearts with the greatest of motivation as we follow Christ in this world. And these words will also remind us of the judgment that fell upon the Son on the cross. This is the good news of the gospel which the writer to Hebrews is really speaking. As our catechism says, “**Christ was made a curse for us; and Christ died for our naughtiness, and was laid in the grave; and God was fully satisfied; and released him from that prison, and took him up to Heaven, and set him on his right hand.**” This is really the message of the new covenant, which fulfills the old. Brothers and sisters, for the Christian, the word of God concerning Christ is a “sweet smelling fragrance.”

This is why, when we see such warnings in the Book of Hebrews concerning judgment, we are fearful . . . For we know these words are true. We say with Peter, when Jesus asks him, “***Are you going to leave me as others are doing,***” and He says, “***Where can I go? For you have the WORDS of eternal life***” (John 6:68). Often, through the years, and recently, I FEEL like I am hanging by a thread from falling away from the living God. But, this morning, the Word of God has again served me in the most kind and beautiful way, as once again, I look unto Christ, who is the author and finisher of my faith. And these words keep me moving down the road to heaven! After all, “Faith comes by hearing, and by hearing the Word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). They are LIVING. They are POWERFUL. They are JUDGING. I am completely exposed before the Word of God. (And so are most of you!) This is the FIRST way the Word of God works in judgment; As Christians it proves who we are.

But, I also want to point out that the Word has another effect on those who hear it in regards to judgment. Look with me at 2 Cor. 2:14-16: “**But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.** Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many,

peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." To most of the world, the written Word of God is not sweet smelling. I LOVE THIS WORD! It smells to me as the most beautiful smelling flower. But, for those who are perishing, this WORD is not like a beautiful flower, but more like the aroma of a skunk. And this is a great mystery! But, the Word of God to the unbeliever hardens and leads to death . . . just as it did for "that generation" who perished in the dessert. Let me finish with some applications.

Application: The Word of God will always accomplish his purpose in this world. Again, Is. 55:10-11 says, **"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."**

Application: The written Word is ours. Use it. Love it. Memorize it. Mediate on it. Get together and encourage one another in these ways. Brothers and sisters, the written word is God's primary means God has given us in this life as we look forward to our final rest in heaven. In it we find life. In it we find power. In it we find judgment. In it we find EVERYTHING we need for life and godliness.

Application: For the non-Christian. Just as in Moses' day, there are those among us who have a **"form of godliness, but deny it's power"** (2 Tim. 3). As you consider your posture before the Word, your attitude, you lack of love it, pray for God to change your heart. And look unto Christ, who is the fulfillment of all God's promises. And if you come to Christ, He will not cast you away.

Application: No one can hide from the Word of God.

Application: Everyone will stand before the judge and give account based upon God's Word.

(We look forward to part 2 next week, as this passage speaks of the "Essential" Word, which is Christ.)