



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Jesus: Greatest of All Time

The Book

Hebrews 4:11–13

Tim Badal | November 1, 2020



We are currently journeying through the book of Hebrews in a series titled “Jesus: Greatest of All Time.” Turn please to Hebrews 4

as we continue to discern God’s will through His Word. We’ve been learning about a group of Christians who were beat up and knocked down for their faith. Maybe this week you too have felt beat up and knocked down because you’re a follower of Jesus Christ. In this chapter we’ve been looking at the history of the people of Israel. These stories would have been balm for the souls of the first readers of this letter, because they needed something to hold on to; they needed hope.

Today we’re going to be seeing how that hope, that rest, can be found in the Word of God. The mortal mistake of the Israelites in the wilderness generation was that they did not heed God’s Word in their day. As a result, they went their own way and fell into rebellion against God.

The application we can draw from today’s study is that we too need to hold fast to the Word of God, because in our day of testing His Word will lead us to the rest we seek. If you’ve been a follower of Jesus, you are probably not going to learn anything new this morning. My prayer is that as we look at the passage, we will all be reminded of the important place God’s Word needs to hold in our lives and that we will be called to examine our hearts to see whether we have become casual toward the very words that bring us life.

We’re going to pick up our reading at Hebrews 4:11. Many of you have heard these words before, but hopefully hearing them in their context will give you new insight into why studying God’s Word is vital to our continued perseverance and endurance as we run the race marked out for us.

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.

As we think about this Book we’ve been given—a Book that is living and active—I was reminded of another book that arrived on our home this very week as I was growing up. It would send us into a certain trajectory for weeks to come. It was the J.C. Penney catalog. How many remember that catalog and the Sears catalog? They were our version of the internet and Amazon. We had to wait until they arrived to see what was available to buy. In our home, we would fight over those catalogs. The kids wanted to see the toys or electronics under the Christmas tree. Mom wanted to check out the winter clothes fashions. Dad cared most about the hardware and tools that he, like all men, wanted for his garage.

These were the books of dreams. In fact, Sears & Roebuck called it “The Wish Book.” Every merchandiser had a book like this that would come out around this time of year. Montgomery Ward, Service Merchandise—they all had one. They were offering us the opportunity to dream, but they also reminded us that there was a cost to those dreams. We saw right there in print what it would cost to obtain what we wanted. Those catalogs were great. For you who are Millennials or Gen Z, you have no idea what I’m talking about, but these catalogs were a big deal to us. Sears Roebuck even commissioned a poet to write about their catalog:

They know me as a catalog
And yet on lonely nights
I bring them dreams and fancies
And a wealth of real delights
For often when the day is done
And duty's flags are furled
I take this family shopping
Around the markets of the world

Today, I don't want to talk about the Sears catalog. I want to talk about the most important activity we could ever engage in, becoming people of the Book. Like those children and moms and dads who would scurry through the pages of those other catalogs—hoping and dreaming, at the same time realizing the cost of those dreams—I pray we would approach the living Word of God to find our hopes and dreams, as well as the cost of what this Book promises us. I also pray we would dedicate our lives in the season before us to not only the hearing and holding on to this Book, but also to the heeding and doing of the Word of God. May we do this well, not only for the glory of God, but also for our own good.

In the book of Hebrews, we've been learning about God's rest. We've read about a generation who did not enter into that rest. Last week we talked about how important it is for us as a people to enter the rest of God. Here's a statement that I hope will center our minds on this goal: If entering God's rest is what we're seeking, then the Word of God must be our guide. You will never enter God's rest—you will never experience the fullness of God's goodness in your life—unless the Word of God is preeminent in all you say and do.

We see the example of the wilderness generation who heard God's voice. Every day He led them and guided them. But instead of following His ways, they allowed their hearts to be hardened and were led into rebellion. It's my prayer that those of us who long for that rest will hear today that we need to be people of the Word and that through it we would hear the voice of God. In order for this to happen, two things will be required.

Entering God's rest means striving to be people of the Word.

Hebrews 4:11 tells us that if we want to find victory where the wilderness generation found defeat, something needs to be different. *"Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."* How do we do that? The next verse tells us: *"For the word of God is living and active..."*

If we don't want to fall as the Israelites did, if we don't want to rebel against God as they did and therefore miss out on His blessing, we need to strive. But strive to do what? We must strive to be people of the Word. We learned a little bit about the word "strive" last week. It means to toil and work. It means we dedicate ourselves to the daily endeavor of being led by the Word.

This is not a passive Word. Hebrews says this is an active Word. It's opposite to what the Israelites were doing by drifting away from God. The person of the Word cannot drift into God's truth; we have to make it our focus. The idea of striving incorporates all of who we are being expended to grab hold of what we're longing for. The person who longs for the rest of God will make His Word their daily focus.

Can that be said of you this morning? When you first get up, is one of your daily priorities being in God's Word? Is your day incomplete until then? Are you willing to clear anything else in your schedule so you'll have time to hear the voice of God?

We have to see that which we're striving for as being important—in fact, more important than anything else. That's easy for us as a church to say; our middle name is Bible. We can say with all honesty, "The Word of God is important." Many of us say this. That's the Sunday School answer. But is it so important that we will do all we need to not only to hear the Word, but to bring it to bear on every facet of our lives? That's the harder thing. Can you claim, "I'm going to take the important truth about God's Word and allow it to steer me in the direction He wants me to go"? You have a choice. You can be a person of the world or you can be a person of the Word.

Sadly, many of us are people of the world during the week. We're entertained like the world entertains itself. We prioritize our lives like it does. We use our money like the world does. We talk and act like the world. Then we grab our Bible from the back of our car where we left it last Sunday and we walk into church with confidence. But what we're assuming is that the preacher will be a

preacher of the Word. It's a bunch of worldly individuals expecting one person to bring them the Word they've been ignoring for the past six days. Am I close?

We can speak about the importance of God's Word, but we don't apply what we say. This will result in certain things coming out in our lives. That's why the context of this passage is vital to our understanding. Remember, the premise of this is don't be like the children of Israel, who wandered in the wilderness because they were unwilling to listen to the voice of God.

Let's do a little review. Go back to Hebrews 3, beginning in verse seven, which recites Psalm 95:

⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
on the day of testing in the wilderness,

⁹ where your fathers put me to the test
and saw my works for forty years.

¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation,
and said, 'They always go astray in their heart;
they have not known my ways.'

¹¹ As I swore in my wrath,
'They shall not enter my rest.'"

The author of Hebrews then moves from the Old Testament generation to the New Testament generation:

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

What does this look like? Verse 15, "*As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'*" Rebellion wasn't step one. The fashioning of the golden calf wasn't their first step in this foray into rebellion and disobedience. What was it? The answer is clear: they stopped listening to the voice of God.

There are three things we need to see from this. We don't want to be like them; we want to enter God's rest. This involves hearing God's Word, holding on to God's Word, then heeding God's Word. Let's talk about these things.

Striving involves hearing the Word.

The first mistake these people made in the wilderness—and our first mistake—is they stopped hearing the voice of God. The amazing thing is that God was speaking all the time.

When we hear the phrase, "The Word of God," as in "The Word of God is living and active," what does that mean? It's the totality of the words of God. For the Old Testament days, it was the verbal voice of God as He walked with Adam and Eve in the coolness of the garden. Then we see it was the voice of God as He spoke to Moses through a burning bush about freeing His people from Egypt. It was that still small voice Elijah heard in the midst of all that was going on around him. It's also the voice of God that speaks to us through the pages of the Book that's in your hands. It's living and active, able to rebuke, correct and train the man or woman of God in righteousness. Why? Because all Scripture is God breathed. So God is speaking, but are we listening? How do you know if you're listening? Let me ask you three questions.

First, is the voice of God no louder than everyone else's? By that I mean does God's voice sound just like any of the other noise we hear? One of the great frustrations a parent feels happens when you go into the TV room, you have a job for one of your children to do and you say, "Hey, son. Hey, daughter. I need you to do this." But nothing happens. They're looking at the screen and that's all they hear. They may have a sense that someone is talking, but the voices on the TV are louder.

I get frustrated by that. How many of you would agree? You know your voice is way more important than anything else being said on that screen. You are jealous for your words to be heard. How much more jealous is the God of the universe when He speaks to us, but His voice is drowned out in the many voices around us? The God Who created us, Who knows us, Who knows our anxieties and fears is speaking to us, but we can't hear Him.

Second, be careful if you're able to tune God out. You hear Him speaking, but you don't listen. As I teenager, I majored in tuning out my parents. It's like Charlie Brown's mom when she speaks to him from the other room. It's that trombone voice: "Wahmp wah wahmp wahmp wahmp." I heard the noise, but I didn't know what they were saying.

God may be speaking to us right now. *"Today, if you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts"* (Hebrews 4:7). Some of you are only hearing, "Wahmp wah wahmp wahmp wahmp." You're tuning Him out. "Is Nick Foles going to have a good football game today? Is Matt Nagy going to call the right plays?" That's what you're thinking about right now. "I raked the leaves yesterday, but now my neighbor's leaves are in my yard." "Where am I going to go? Restaurants are all shut down and I'm hungry." "Wahmp wah wahmp wahmp wahmp." As your mind is thinking about these things right now, when is the "Wahmp wah wahmp wahmp wahmp" going to stop?

Be careful, God is speaking and either His voice is no louder than anyone else's or you have figured out a way to tune Him out.

Third—and this is even more insidious—be careful that when you hear the voice of God, you hear what He says, then, to put it bluntly, you tell Him to shut up. Some of you are hearing the voice of God. God is saying, "I don't want you to live that way. I don't want you engaged in that activity. I don't want you looking at those things on the internet. I don't want you talking that way." You hear it, it's loud and clear, it's not "Wahmp wah wahmp wahmp wahmp." It's, "Don't do those things! Live in light of My truth." But you're thinking, "You know what? I don't want to hear this. Leave me alone. I want these things more than I want Your Word."

These three things will tell you if you're a person of the world or if you're a person of the Word. God is speaking. Are you listening?

Striving involves holding on to the Word.

Once we hear the Word, the second thing we need to do is hold on to the Word. Going back to Hebrews 3:8, *"Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness..."* That phrase "day of testing" is important. It's referring to the day of tumults, the day of struggle. God knows that when we get squeezed, we turn to Him. When things don't go our way, we run to Him. That's why we're quick with 911 prayers. We find ourselves cornered and we can only turn to Him.

This isn't what the Israelites did in their day of testing. They weren't listening, so they didn't have God's truths and promises close by that would hold them secure in the day of testing. Likewise, if we're not hearing God in the good times, then when life gets hard we will have nothing to hold on to.

Each day—whether life is going well or not—we grab the Word and hold on tight. We praise God for the good and we praise Him in the bad. We ask Him to watch over us, care for us and protect us, knowing that it's His Word that holds us up. It's His Word that causes us to resist temptations. So when trouble comes, where do you turn? What are you holding on to? Are you drawing near to the God of the Word or are you turning to the world?

Striving involves heeding the Word.

Finally, we have to heed the Word. This means we need to do what God says we should do. Look again at Hebrews 3:10: *"Therefore I was provoked with that generation..."* Why was God angry? Because He was talking and no one was listening. God is also angry with us and brings discipline into our lives when He speaks and we don't respond in obedience.

Why was God provoked with that generation? Hebrews 3:10: *"They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways."* They didn't know His ways because they didn't listen when He spoke. The idea of knowing God's ways is literally described here as walking in lock step with Him.

Is the Word having such influence on your life that you're walking arm in arm, step by step, with the Lord? When someone sees you, do they realize, "That person is marching to the beat of the Word of God. In every cadence of his life, he's in step with God's Word." The wilderness generation did not do this; therefore they did not experience God's blessings, mercies and grace. We must not presume upon God to give us these things if we're unwilling to walk with Him. We must strive to be people of the Word.

Entering God's rest involves submitting to the power of the Word.

Why would we do this unless there's something about the Word that makes it valuable to us? We need to see the power of the Word. This is where Hebrews 4:12 comes in. It's a very well-known verse. I remember learning it in Awana. *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword..."*

Notice that this verse begins with the word *“For...”* There’s a connection between what we know about God’s Word and what the children of Israel did not do with the voice of God. They didn’t allow it to expose their sin. They didn’t allow it to penetrate their hearts. As a result, they did not experience God’s rest and God’s blessing in their lives. What do we need to know about this Word? What would cause us to listen to the voice of God.

First, the Word of God is living. It’s alive. This isn’t an old, dead book we’re reading; it’s a live Book and it changes lives. How do we know this? We know it because each one of us has been changed by it. If you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, at some moment in time, God’s Word came to bear on your life. Someone preached the Word to you and it impacted your life. Someone sang a song about Jesus and His grace and it moved you to change from being a follower of the world to being a follower of Christ. Somehow the spoken Word of God moved you and changed you.

Turn please to Romans 10:13. It says, *“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* That is true, but look at Paul’s logic in the next verses. If that’s how people are saved, how they’re brought from death to life, then what has to take place?

¹⁴ But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

A person cannot experience the rest, grace or mercy of God unless someone or something tells them about the Word of God. You can’t. You cannot experience the death-to-life transformation without someone bringing you the good news of Jesus Christ. So today you’re hearing the truth that apart from Christ, you can do nothing. Today, will you harden your heart and live in disobedience, or will you give your life to Jesus Christ?

This is a living Book. It changes lives. We are witnesses to the life change this Book brings about.

Second, this Book is energetic. It’s active. The Greek word for active is *energes*, from which we get the word energy. It’s not just a little bit of energy—it is unbridled energy.

Yesterday my family came over for the trick-or-treating celebration and my little niece JoJo was in our living room. Unbeknownst to Mom or Dad, little JoJo had gotten into her candy. How did we figure that out? She was running all over the place, arms in the air, loving life. She had gotten energy—unbridled energy.

This is something like what we’re talking about here, this unbridled energy the Word of God gives us. Maybe today you feel sapped. Maybe today you’re weary. Have you turned to the Word of God? Some of us are quick to go to the drive-thru to deal with that weariness, believing a \$14 cup of coffee is going to change things. God is trying to tell us, “No amount of expresso, no amount of Starbucks or Dunkin is going to give you the energy you need to make it through life.”

So what does? Meditating day and night on the Word of the Lord. It energizes us. It gives us the refreshment our weary souls need. That’s why Psalm 19:7 says, *“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”* Psalm 119:25 says, *“My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word!”* Psalm 119:50 adds, *“This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.”* The only thing that will give us life, vitality and health in this world is the Word of God. Are you listening?

The idea of energizing requires an insatiable hunger and thirst for more of that which is energizing. The idea is that if we are sniffing the aroma of God’s Word, it’s whetting our appetite. When we get a morsel of God’s truth in our bellies, all we’ll want is more and more and more. So let me ask, are you hungering for the Word of God so much that even though you are filled, you still want more?

What does His Word do? It does three things for us that are so vitally important if we’re going to run this race with perseverance.

We must allow the Word to pierce us.

Many times we see this as a stand-alone message and we miss the point. The author is speaking of spiritual surgery—why? The writer of Hebrews has declared our malady. We see this malady in Hebrews 3, in verses 8, 12, 13 and 15. What is it? It’s a hardened and unbelieving heart. That’s our problem. The reason we don’t enter God’s rest, the reason we don’t experience God’s blessing in our lives, the reason we don’t experience the fullness of God as followers of Jesus Christ is there is a hardened part of our hearts.

God therefore tells us He's going to do surgery on us. He's going to pierce our hearts, cutting away the hardened areas so we might experience the fullness of His grace and mercy. We must allow the Word of God to do this.

Here's the problem. When something pierces us, it hurts. One of the ways you know you're hearing the voice of the Lord is if you have that twinge of pain when He cuts. "Ow. You're getting a little too close to home, Lord. You're calling me things I don't like to be called, but they're true. You're pointing out areas in my life that need to change. I don't want to hear that."

Notice how it's expressed in Hebrews 4:12. The Word of God pierces with a double-edged sword, which means it cuts both ways. You can't get away from it. As it cuts, it's cutting on all sides of what it touches. Most knives only cut on one side, but this sword cuts everything it touches.

We must allow the Word to purify us.

Also, it goes deeper, dealing with joints and marrow. These aren't superficial wounds; these are getting to the heart of the matter. Why? That hardened heart will send us right to hell. So God graces us with His Word to cut out that which is going to send us to a place we don't want to go. It purifies us. It deals not only with the joints and marrow—the physical aspects of sin—but it also deals with the very source of it, *"discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* The Word does something other people can't do for us. We might go to our small groups, but the talk is superficial. "How's life? How are you doing?" "I'm loving the Lord and I'm living for Him." But then you go home and you know what you're doing. You know what you're part of, what your mouth is saying, what your eyes are seeing, what your mind is thinking. You know it—and you're not the only one who knows it. You may have faked out everyone else, but the Word knows it. God's voice is speaking to you, saying, "You can't live that way. You can't do those things and expect My grace and mercy. Change your ways. Turn away from your sin. Don't allow the deceitfulness of sin to ruin your opportunity to enter My rest."

The Word of God does something no great accountability partner can do. You can lie to the accountability partner. You can fake them out. But the Word says, "I see it. I know your heart." It knows the real you. It knows the you when nobody else is around. It knows the you when you're lying through your teeth and saying all manner of bad things in your mind about the person you're smiling at. It's calling these things out, cutting them and purifying you. Why? Because the Word of God comes from the heart of God, and the heart of God is that you would not live in sin, but live in the freedom of His voice and His truth.

We must allow the Word to prepare us.

What is all this for? This is vitally important. The Word of God prepares us. Verse 13 ends with some scary words. *"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."* You may say, "Okay, that's not me. I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. I'm a Christian. I don't have to do anything." But remember, the book of Hebrews was written to believers and it says we're going to give an account. The Bible is clear that every person will stand before God. The unbeliever will stand before the Lord in His great throne room and He will determine their destination. Whether a person is great or small, they will stand before the Lord with no excuse for their sin or rebellion, and they will be sent to the fiery dungeons for eternity, separated from God.

Likewise, Christian, we too will give an account before the throne of Christ, as Jesus addresses how we lived while we were in the body, whether for Him or not. Here's the grace. This is the best way I know to put it. For the unbeliever, there will be no warning. Like a pop quiz, the judgment day will come. For the believer, God has given us the test in advance and He's given us the answer key. He tells us that all things will be exposed. Judgment is coming, but we know how we'll be judged. Even better, we're told how to pass the judgment test. He tells us to be people of the Word. How do we prepare for the judgment of Christ? We do it by being humble and obedient, without hardening our hearts to the voice of God.

He's asking us to get up on the operating table and allow Him to do daily surgery in our lives. Will it hurt? Yep. Will it cause us to have to say no to things? Yep. But in the process—especially on the Day of the Lord—we will be able to stand before the throne of grace with confidence. We'll be able to stand before our Lord and Savior with confidence, and we'll hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. When I spoke to you, you listened. When I called you to something, you did it. When I asked you to serve, you served. When I asked you to give, you gave. When I asked you to love, you loved. You did what I asked you to do. So enter into your rest and receive My blessing."

Let me ask you another simple question. God is speaking—are you listening? Do you hear Him? We're going to pivot to a time of remembering the Lord's work in our lives, a time of communion. How do we connect these two things? Here's how. Communion with God is only possible when His Word is our companion. You and I will never commune with God if His Word is not in our hearts, in our minds and on our tongues. If it's not leading us, we will never know what it means to live in communion with God.

Thinking about Psalm 119:105: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* I want you to do some evaluating of your life. How do you do that? You listen to the voice of God. Let me tell you how God speaks. As you begin to quiet your hearts, ask, "God, are You speaking in a way that's convicting me of sin, a private and personal sin?" If you sense His conviction, your response should be sorrow and repentance.

Maybe God will commend you for your obedience. Then your response should be that of humble gratitude and joy.

Maybe the Lord is commanding you to do something. Will you look to Him for the strength and resolve to obey Him and do it with His strength?

Maybe the Lord is speaking to you about a promise He's made to you, a promise you need to hold tightly to in this time of need. In this time of communion, marvel at His grace and trust that He will do what He says.

Maybe He's warning you, "Run from that sin. Run from that person. Run from that crowd. You're going into danger." Take seriously His warning and with a thankful heart run from these things and turn to Him.

Maybe today He's wanting to make Himself known to you in new ways. Then admire Him with a heart of worship, that You might be able to see and enjoy His goodness and His beauty.

Let the Word of God be a lamp to your feet as you listen to the voice of God. Let's spend some time in quietness, listening to our Lord speak to us.

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