Introduction:

When I used to live in Tasmania (a few years ago), I would travel to Melbourne for meetings with Churches of Christ in Victoria. I’d fly in for the day and hire a car from the airport. Usually I would hire something small and reliable – just enough to get me across town to meetings etc. (e.g. Toyota Corolla)

One day, it was early and raining, I approached the counter of the rental car company, and the lady asked if I would like a free upgrade. Of course I was interested, but what sort of car did they want to upgrade me to? It was a Toyota FT86 sports car. I had no idea what this type of car looked like, and I was absolutely shocked (stoked) when I arrived at the parking bay to find this beast of a car. It was black, sleek and fast. It looked like the Batmobile. (I felt like Batman driving it!)

I had the best day. It cornered like you wouldn’t believe. I took it out to a mate’s place. He had an SS Commodore and a VW Golf Turbo. We jumped in and took it for a spin around the block. It was mad!!!

What an upgrade! I didn't want to take it back. In fact I never wanted to go back to what I had experienced before. The Toyota Corolla just didn't cut it any more. They were OK cars, but this was simply the best car I had ever driven.

That’s our situation here with Hebrews 4. Jewish believers had experienced the law (which was good), but they had been upgraded through baptism to the best – salvation by faith in JESUS CHRIST!!
Now they were coping a hard time, and they wanted to go backwards – back to the comfort of the law – just to keep others happy & off their backs.

In the previous few chapters, the writer to Hebrews has talked about Jesus being superior to both Moses and angels. Today we continue on from Chapter 3 with the concept of finding true rest in Christ.

The Homework this week was to read Chapter 4 of Hebrews. Let’s read it together, and then we’ll pray that God will reveal it’s truth to each of us, demonstrating again that Christ alone is simply the best.

Don’t forget, if you missed any of the messages on Hebrews and would like to catch up, you can download the notes from the Laidley Baptist Church website.

If you have your Bibles, we're going to read through Hebrews Chapter 4 together

Let’s pray …

Gracious God & our Heavenly Father,

Open your Word to us today. We’ve all come to worship you and to learn from you. May this time be a time of furthering our understanding of your greatness and of your work of grace in our lives. Come bless your people, O God. May we find our true rest in you. Amen

Warning about disobedience

Chapter 4 of Hebrews continues on in the warning of disobedience. To recap from last week:

These Jewish believers are in a situation parallel to that of Israel at Kadesh-Barnea (spies who reported back about whether they could take the Land). Their persecution is similar to that which Israel faced from the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. The Jewish believers in Hebrews had severed all ties to the established system of Judaism and had identified with Christ in baptism. But by doing this, they had incurred the wrath of the Jewish religious community. They were being persecuted, but not yet martyred, which was a strong possibility. They were under pressure. Their life was at stake, in more ways than one.

If you were facing being killed for your decision to follow Christ, what would you do? Would you renounce Jesus, only to come back to him another day perhaps? [That’s the situation here. ]
THE PROMISE OF REST

These believers lived close enough to Jerusalem (and the Jewish religious system) to easily mingle back in to the feasts and rituals, and by doing so hoped that their persecutors might forget about their baptism into Christ. Hebrews 10:25 suggests that some had already given up meeting together as believers in Jesus, in order to escape their persecution.

But the readers of this letter have a promise from God of entering into his rest. This is not the rest of salvation. That has already been established back in Chapter 3, verse 1. They are already believers! NOR is it the future millennial rest – where all persecution will cease. This isn’t their present situation.

The only conclusion is that the faith/life rest referred to in verse 1 is the rest into which a believer enters by faith, and in which he/she receives the promised blessings of God that God gives to those who obey Him.

In verse 1 of Chapter 4 there is a danger of falling short of the rest. The word ‘therefore’ connects to what the writer has just said in the last 3 verses of Chapter 3. In other words – ‘in light of Israel’s failure to enter into Canaan Rest, there is now a danger looming for these believers’. They might fall short of entering into a rest that God is offering. Because of their present situation of persecution, they might fall short of attaining to all that God wants them to attain to in this life.

The entire purpose of this whole letter to the Hebrews is to get the Jewish believers to enter the fullness of rest. The promise of rest in the Old Testament is still unfulfilled, but not withdrawn.

There are two words used for ‘rest’. But the one used most (katapausin) means ‘A cessation of activity’ (used 8 times in Hebrews). The second word for rest we’ll talk about shortly.

Verse 2 – the writer says that these readers have no excuse because they have had the Gospel preached to them. In Numbers 13-14, 12 men came back from the Promised Land of Canaan. They all made their report and the children of Israel made a wrong decision as a result of that report.

Here the writer of Hebrews is addressing people in a similar situation – these Jewish believers have received a message from the 12 Apostles. What will they do now with this report?
Verse 3 states that some believers are entering the rest. The rest in this verse is Creation Rest. It says 'my rest' referring to God’s rest. But because they have believed they have begun to enter this Creation Rest though the final part of it is still future. The Jewish believers must exercise faith in order to enjoy what this rest has to offer.

He quotes Psalm 95:11. The Wilderness generation did not enter that rest even though God had possessed it since Creation. In Psalm 95 God announces that there is a future rest – a salvation rest.

Verses 4-5 tell us that this rest has been prepared. Verse 4 is all about Creation Rest (Genesis 2:2) which is a completed work by the Messiah. One day believers will enjoy the fullness of this Creation Rest when their work on earth is done, and they go to Heaven.

Verse 5 indicates that God has offered another chance of rest – salvation rest – a rest that must be entered into by faith. Israel never entered into this rest because of their disobedience and unbelief. But the invitation is given by God now where it says, 'It still remains for some to enter that rest’.

The re-offer is found in Verse 7. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit coming through David in Psalm 95, God has re-offered the rest to believers. The writer is encouraging them to press on to spiritual maturity in order to enter into a faith rest life.

DO IT TODAY!

The emphasis in verse 7 is on the word ‘today’. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

He is asking them to respond immediately, because some opportunities are limited to a specific time/place, just like Israel at Kadesh-Barnea & the report of the spies.

For these believers it is A.D. 70. They are being urged to make a once and for all decision today to press on to spiritual maturity. Don’t make an irrevocable decision and reach a point of no return. If they make the wrong decision, they will suffer the same fate as the Wilderness generation – physical death.

Verse 8 – Joshua did NOT bring them to the rest of spiritual maturity. Joshua did indeed give them Canaan Rest (i.e. rest from their enemies), but not the total rest that God had planned for the children of Israel.
Joshua failed to give them the kind of rest that comes from spiritual maturity – this can only come through the Messiah.

**Verse 9** – the writer now turns his attention away from Canaan Rest and towards Sabbath Rest. This is the second word for rest used here – *sabbatismos* – which doesn’t refer to a Sabbath Day but to a Sabbath celebration of God’s life-sustaining presence among them.

This is the ideal rest! It is provided by God and it is available today. The writer of Hebrews is saying that they can attain it by faith. It remains for the true believer – whether Jew or Gentile – it’s a promise of rest available for every believer.

**If a believer persists in his/her faith, they will reach a level of spiritual maturity when they will cease to struggle with the basics of the spiritual life.**

**Verse 10** confirms the Sabbath Rest. Just as God has ceased from His works, so the believer ceased to rely on their own works/efforts, and by faith has trusted God to get them through the situation. It has a future aspect which is Heaven. However, there is still a position of rest that the believer can enjoy right now.

The writer deals with this REST in 3 tenses:
- **PAST** tense → salvation
- **FUTURE** tense → Heaven/Messianic Kingdom
- **PRESENT** tense → spiritual maturity

The readers have experienced the PAST tense (i.e. salvation) – they have become believers.

They have a FUTURE hope waiting for them. But the main emphasis is what they need right now.

They need to learn to experience the **PRESENT** rest of faith – SPIRITUAL MATURITY. If they can mature in their faith, they will cease to go through these spiritual struggles (i.e. being tempted to return to Judaism).

**Verses 11-13** the writer is encouraging them to enter into rest – the present rest of spiritual maturity. There is a sense of urgency/quickness. He is not talking about future glory. Sabbath Rest is the rest of spiritual maturity, and that’s what he wants them to press on to.
And because there is a danger of failing, he uses the example of the disobedience of Kadesh-Barnea, to warn them about the physical death that might befall them. They will not lose salvation, but will lose their physical lives.

Any unbelief will not go undetected. Detection of failure will be conducted by the Word of God. Because the Word of God is both living and working, it will one day call all into account before God.

**THE WORD OF GOD** (Hebrews 4:12)

The ‘Word of God’ is described five ways:

- **It is living.** Why? Because it is from the Living God. For example, the Word of God can make a spiritually dead sinner spiritually alive.

- **It is active.** It means powerful or energy. It is so active that it transforms a person. (Colossians 1:29)

- **It is sharper.** It has an incisive quality. Sharper than any other weapon. Often symbolized as a sword (Ephesians 6:17) – the Sword of the Spirit.

- **It is piercing/penetrating.** It can decipher a division between soul & spirit. These 2 terms are used interchangeably in Scripture. They are not 2 entities. They are 2 facets of the immaterial part of man (just like joints & marrow are 2 parts of the material man). The Word of God is able to pierce/penetrate/discern even the believer’s soul & spirit.

- **It is quick to discern.** It has discrimination and judgment. The word used here is part of the English word ‘critic’. The Word of God is a critic where it can discern the thoughts *(what a man is thinking)* and intents *(why a man is thinking it)* of the heart. The Word of God can discern between the two.

Because the Word of God is all these 5 things, it will call believers into account one day before the Lord.

**That’s why these Jewish believers need to be diligent to press on to spiritual maturity.**
3rd PILLAR OF JUDAISM: THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

We’ve talked about two pillars of Judaism – the Angels & Moses – and how Jesus is better than both. Now, the writer turns to the third pillar of Judaism, which is the Levitical Priesthood, in the last few verses in Chapter 4.

Earlier in Hebrews 2:17 & 3:1 Jesus is referred to as a High Priest. The writer goes on to prove that Jesus is superior to the Levitical Priesthood.

To do this, the writer uses 5 contrasts:
- Jesus has a better position;
- Jesus is a better priest;
- The New Priesthood is based on a better covenant;
- The New Priesthood functions in a better sanctuary;
- The New Priesthood is based on a better sacrifice.

Jesus has a better position (vv14-16)

Jesus has a better position than the Levitical priest (of the Old Testament).

The Levitical Priest (e.g. Aaron), as the High Priest, went into the Holy of Holies and after finishing his duties, came out. A year later he would go in (and out) again.

This is NOT the case with Jesus. He has passed through the first & second heavens and has entered into the third heaven, and has remained there.

The place of this High Priest’s ministry is in Heaven, not on earth. Being in heaven is a superior position. Because the place of his ministry is in Heaven, He is able to bring the ones He represents directly into the presence of God. Jesus’ humanity and human nature allows Him to be sympathetic, yet He is also the Son of God. Because of his deity (as the Son of God), Jesus has a power that no earthly high priest possesses.

So let’s hold fast to our confession in light of all this.

Jesus is the content of our confession (Hebrews 3:1), now the writer says to hold fast (i.e. grip/cling to) to this confession.

One reason they should do that is found in verse 15. It explains the type of high priest they have. He’s no ordinary high priest ... He suffered all the same points of temptation they have suffered, BUT HE DID NOT SIN.
Jesus is sympathetic in that he knows how we feel when things go wrong socially, financially, physically, spiritually. He also knows how it is to be tempted but without sinning.

**The 3 Areas of Temptation:**

John 2:16 mentions the three areas of temptation:

- Lust of the flesh
- Lust of the eyes
- Pride of life

Every specific temptation will fit into one of these categories.

Let's use John 2 as the example:

Jesus in his 40 day fast was tempted in His flesh to turn stones into bread. His flesh was hungry & cried out to be satisfied. But it was not the Father's will for Him to use His messianic power for self-gratification.

Next, Jesus was shown a satanic vision where He could see all the Kingdoms of this earth, and was told that he could have authority over them all if he would worship Satan only once. With His eyes, He could see the power & the glory he could have by bypassing the cross. But it was the Father's will to obtain it by means of the cross.

Finally, He was taken to the pinnacle of the Temple and told that if He threw himself down, and if He was the Con of God, then angels will catch him and he cannot hurt himself before the time. This was a temptation in the area of the pride of life. Satan was telling Jesus to prove who He claimed to be.

Jesus suffered in all 3 areas, the same as you & me. Through all this Jesus was tempted in all points (in every way). Jesus understands what it feels like to be tempted, therefore that is why He can be a sympathetic High Priest.

Verse 16 is the application.

**Therefore, in light of the fact that the readers have a High Priest in 3rd Heaven, who has suffered temptation and is our sympathetic High Priest, they need to use Him!!!!**
Let us draw near to the Him with boldness and confidence, having the freedom to speak and to state our needs to Him. The reason to do this (drawing near & using Jesus as our High Priest) is for receiving mercy, finding grace to help us in our time of need.

So, the solution to the problems these Jewish believers were having was not to return to Judaism, but to confidently make use of Jesus, their High Priest, to receive grace to get them through this difficult period.

**Whenever a believer stumbles in his/her spiritual life, it is not because there is insufficient grace, but because he/she failed to appropriate the grace available to them.**

Next week in Hebrews Chapter 5 we'll look at the other 4 contrasts, that Jesus is – a better priest, a better covenant, a better sanctuary, a better sacrifice. We’ll look at the Priesthood, Melchizedek & other things.

Next week - Hebrews Chapter 5 – ‘Bottle-fed? ... or Steak & Veggies?’

Your homework for the next week is to read Hebrews 5 – just 14 verses!

**CONCLUSION:**

I want to finish with a media clip. I started my message with an illustration about getting upgraded to the best car I have ever had (simply the best). Jesus Christ is the upgrade that we have been given, and as a result we have the promise of rest, death cannot touch us, a home in Heaven ... so many more promises. It’s the best upgrade ever!!!

But how many times do we (like the Hebrews readers) get tempted to go back to what we think is best? Our comfort zone, rather than pressing on to spiritual maturity, trusting Him more and more when we can’t see the end result or the finish line. It's the constant struggle of the believer's life. It’s what this series in Hebrews is all about. It’s about trusting in Christ alone. Only then will we move into spiritual maturity and a faith life of rest – a rest that is now and in the future.

Let's have a look at the clip and then we'll pray to finish.

**MEDIA CLIP – “Do you Trust me?”** (by Skitguys) 2 min 21 secs.
I want to conclude with a final illustration. A week ago Miriam gave me Tiffany’s laptop which had been locked by some encrypting software called Bitlocker. It comes with the laptop’s operating system. It’s pretty robust stuff. It locks your hard drive so you can’t get into it. If you’re a computer geek, it alters all the sectors on your hard drive with 128 bit encryption to protect it. And the password is a 48 character password. Pretty impossible to break or hack.

But here’s the catch – there’s no backdoor password. Even the FBI have attempted to coerce Microsoft into modifying their software with no luck. There’s just no way to get back in. The only other solution is to reset the whole computer which loses all your date/photos/documents … everything.

Tiffany’s laptop, for one reason or another, had been shut down by Bitlocker – it comes up with the blue screen asking for a 48 digit password!!! So Miriam gives it to me. I’m not sure why she gave it to me. Maybe it was because of my past history as a computer IT guy – but that was like 20 years ago now!!!

Because Miriam had purchased it at JB HiFi about 9 months ago, it’s still under warranty, so yesterday afternoon we headed into Riverlink to see the computer support staff at JB HiFi. When we arrived and explained the situation, the computer guy said he didn’t think he could help. Resetting the computer and losing all the data seemed to be the only solution.

There was nothing that Miriam, the JB computer guy or I could do. As they were talking about it and thinking about it, I just started to pray “God, I trust you. This is only something that you can do. Please help this guy to get Tiffany’s computer working again.” And I just believed in God in faith that something would happen.

It was the simplest prayer, but prayed in desperate faith and trust in God. Almost immediately, the guy (who was stumped) came up with an idea about searching Tiffany’s Microsoft profile through her Gmail account and hey presto – there it was. The 48 digit password stored. We keyed it in and unlocked everything on the laptop. Everything was restored. We were all over the moon, and rejoiced with $1 frozen slushies from HJ’s on the way home as a reward.

I wonder how often we trust God with even the little things? I tend to give them all to God, no matter how hard. The harder the situation, the harder I am praying, and the harder I am trusting God. When it looks like I’m going to fall flat on my back, I just do it and trust in God. God calls us to press on to maturity as we trust Him more and more.

Are you the type of person that puts their trust in God in the everyday things?
As I said earlier, we have a High Priest in Heaven, who has suffered temptation and is our sympathetic High Priest, we need to use Him!!!!

Throughout my life, as I have trusted God in the tough (and sometimes little) things, it has helped strengthened my spiritual maturity. I have proven that the rest/reward comes as a result of these trust experiences. Now, I wouldn’t go back to what it was like before – anxiety, trying to do it on your own, stressing, cursing, losing sleep, hurting people with harsh words, struggling.

Nope. I’m learning to just trust Jesus. After all, he is our Great High Priest who sits at the right hand of God, sympathetic to everything that I could possibly go through. Why wouldn’t I trust Jesus?

As your Pastor and as a teacher of the Word, I pray that you too would enter into this faith life’s rest as you trust Jesus more, and as you press forward into spiritual maturity. I pray that God will open our eyes even more as we look further into this Book of Hebrews.

**Let’s pray …**

*Loving and Mighty Father God,*

*We do look forward to that day when you will meet us, encourage us and invite us to enter into our future rest. It will be simply the best to be with you Jesus for ever. But right now, you have re-offered rest in this life as we learn to trust you more.*

*I pray for everyone who has heard your Word today, that they will experience this rest as we press into you and grow spiritually. Mature us, encourage us, give us rest in the midst of life’s struggles and difficulties. You are there in the midst of them ... and it’s in you, and in You alone, that we can find rest.*

*Thank you for your words of life to us today. We are blessed because of them. Thank you for your love for us as our Great High Priest. Thank you for your sacrifice to save us and give us rest forever.*

*This week, may we remember to find our rest in You as we trust You more and more.*

*Amen*

**Closing Song ~ It is well with my Soul**
A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God

1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.” 5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage 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 later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

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. 13 Nothing in all creation is
hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.
15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.