The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 4

 We are continuing on with the exhortation the writer started with in chapter one. Along with the continuation, we begin to get into a little more doctrinal offerings to bolster the writer’s exhortation. We now have the picture and I like to remind myself where we have been so that we continue to understand the times the Jewish Christians were in and the pressures they faced.

 From the time of Jesus Christ’s tenure on earth, the Jewish leaders were noting how their overall leadership was waning, both from the teachings of Jesus, to the looming presence of the Romans. The Jewish people were also caught in the crossfire, because for centuries they had been under the law as taught by the Priests and Pharisees (the Sadducees too) and in their present age caught up in the political net of the Romans and pretend kings. With real truth as taught by Jesus and subsequently by His Disciples, those Jews who turned to Jesus faced an angry Jewish leadership and by the time of this writing were facing the demonic Nero and his denouncement of this Christian ‘Way’ and viciously took it out on the Christians.

 We now have, around 55 to 60 AD, first, second and third generation Christians as well as new converts who were being added as the Apostles were ministering. How does one stay strong in faith with the prospects of being cruelly tortured and killed, looming in their near futures? Frankly, I know in my heart, I would be seriously thinking of ways to keep me and my family secure. But we are here in the now and have no idea what it is like to face that kind of future, do we? As each succeeding Roman Emperor came to power, the madness of the emperor became worse and more debauched. Every day you lived in fear that this day would be the day you would be captured and imprisoned in a Roman Garrison until Nero wanted more garden lamps.

 The writer now continues on with his ‘therefores,’ or in other words, continuing with the previous thoughts bringing conclusions to those thoughts.

 A] Hebrews 4: 1 through 5; (read)

 1] “*Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.”*

 After explaining the issues of the Israelites under Moses, whose lack of faith and understanding of what God was doing and their subsequent falling by the wayside and dying, the writer wraps up this portion by stating that because of the act of Jesus Christ on the cross with His death and resurrection, there is a new promise of abiding in the Savior in our new home on high. As the writer had explained about faith or lack of with the Israelites of yore, these folks had that promise as long as they remained strong in their faith.

 The writer goes on, ‘let us fear’ equating himself with the people, stating that what their real fear is, is losing faith and losing that hope of their real relationship with their Savior, thus losing their home in Christ. As long as you can maintain that relationship with Jesus in spite of all the hazards and dangers that were present, you are in that place where those dangers represent the kinship with Jesus, and knowing that we all have a better place we will soon be. The writer surely does not want them to come up short of the goal and then lose all they had.

 2] “*For indeed the Gospel was preached to us as well as to them, but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”*

 We are still talking about the contrast of the Israelites under Moses and the Jewish Christians the writer is addressing. Moses, through his accepting from God, writing down what God gave to him, and then teaching of the Law to the Israelites, and yet, they did not believe, even when seeing firsthand, the miracles of God. Contrast that to the situation the writer puts to the followers, the Gospel (good news) was preached to them by Jesus, then the Apostles, (probably the writer might have been one of them) and they accepted it and believed.

 Here friends, we see a contrast where the same message is spoken to two different people. One group will accept the message at face value where the other group may totally reject it or reject parts of it. In this case even rejecting parts of it will render the message null and void.

 3] “*For we who have believed, do enter that rest, as he has said; ‘So I swore in My wrath they shall not enter My rest’ although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.”*

 There is that assurance, that those who believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and accept Him as Lord and Savior, will enter that rest. Well what is that rest? One writer calls the ‘rest’ as relief from the stringent rules of the Law, but the consensus states that it is God’s rest or peace from the mortal life one has led. When we believe and are called home to the Living God we then enter His Rest never more having to face the hassle of mortal life.

 The writer then adds the part from Psalm 95:8, because if one will not believe in the Salvation of Christ on the Cross how can that one be at peace with God if he doesn’t believe in God’s grace?

 4] “*For He has spoken of a certain place of the seventh day in this way, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works,’ and again in this place, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”*

 The writer quotes from, first: Genesis 2:2 and then from Exodus 20:11. Can one image all the turmoil from the creation; the stars, galaxies and all things in the universe being created and then our planet Earth, and finally all the living things on it, I mean this must take tremendous energy, so that when God finished all of this, He deserved His rest, and peace. However, when those of His creation do not acknowledge Him and honor him, if they do not believe in Him, do THEY deserve His rest, to be with Him?

 B] Hebrews 4: 6 through 10; (read)

 1] “*Since therefore, it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, ‘today’ after such a long time, as it has been said, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’”*

 As we look into the reasoning that the writer discusses, he is striving to convince the folks that God wants to have that special relationship with His creation, His people, that relationship is, that when their lives are done, God wants them with Him in His peace. He explains that during the time of Moses, as God IS fulfilling His promises to Abraham in making of His people a great and mighty nation, and so in doing so under Moses, a great many of the people did NOT believe and thereby lost their place to be with God their creator, in His peace and rest.

 The door, however, remains open, for all who would call on His name, and believe that Jesus is Lord. The writer uses Davidic references saying that even after all these thousands of years God still yearns for His people to respond. That the call is still out there, and again quotes scripture stating, that when the call is heard, ‘Do not harden your hearts’.

 2] “*For if Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward, have spoken of another day.”*

 A very interesting verse, did this refer to Jesus (Joshua is the name that translated in the Latin to Jesus) as some scholars opine? Other scholars do take this to mean Joshua, son of Nun, and probably referring to Joshua fulfilling the promise of God to the people of Israel, in taking these people into the promised land. Indeed, the people did enter a rest from their captivity and forty-year sojourn in the desert under Joshua. However, this was not the rest some Jewish leaders might have been referring to. There is another ‘DAY’ of the Lord.

 In Numbers 14: 28 – 30, it is mentioned that “They shall not enter into the promised land”, because of the sins of that people, who had left the bondage of Egypt. Scholars like to equate this verse to, “they shall not enter My rest” Because the people yearned to return to the bondage rather than face the adventure ahead, they certainly did NOT deserve to enter the promised land God had for them. They simply did not believe.

 3] “*There remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God.”*

 The writer expressly states that this rest is for all those people who believe. The point is ‘to believe’. Do YOU believe that God is real? Do you believe that Jesus is God, the Son of God? Do you believe that Jesus became man to die for your sins, that you might be redeemed? Saved from your sins?

 This is what was troubling for the people back then. They say they believe, but seem ready to return to the burden of the Law, the restrictions the Priests and Pharisees placed on them, after pressure from the Jewish leaders, and threats from Rome sent them scurrying to find solace in the ‘old ways’. Instead of standing strong in the face of real adversity, they look to hide in the feigned security of old beliefs.

 How many of us older folks look at the modern conveniences of today, but then yearn to the simplicity of our youth? I look at air-conditioning and remember back when we didn’t have it, but somehow, we survived because we didn’t know about ‘air-conditioning’. We look back at our growing up days, and sometimes dream of being back in that time of security in our parents, and in what we knew. It can seem so complex with what we have today.

 4] “*For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”*

 When we who have believed, come to the end of our appointed days, and God calls us home, that means we have finished our work on earth, as God has finished His work of creation, and we find our final rest with Him in His place, which IS our home, under His security as OUR Father. How cool is that!

 C] Hebrews 4: 11 through 13; (read)

 1] “*Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”*

 So, after the examples of disobedience, the turning away, of disregarding the call of God, of falling prey to fear and ignorance, the writer cautions the reader to stand firm, to be at work strengthening our hearts and spirits through the ‘Good News’ and lifting up each other from the pits and snares that lie before them. To be diligent to the task, is to be concentrating so completely, that we do not notice the pitfalls and traps alongside of us.

 An example of this kind of diligence, might be, where my daughter, some time ago, took us on a trip from her home in Tennessee, to Grandfather Mountain using the back roads. It was rainy and the roads were VERY winding, with little to no shoulder and steep drop-offs. As she wended her way around the curves, with great expertise, I had a death grip on the edge of my seat, as I looked out the windows and saw the dangers before us. I was not looking ahead at the road, but only saw what was going past. Eventually as my already weak heart was not cooperating. We decided to turn around and go back. But you see the point.

 2] “*For the Word of God is living and Powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of the soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

 We come to the question of what is the soul and what is the spirit. But first we need to reckon with the Word of God and how the writer uses it in this context. Here we need to go back to John 1: 1 and see the description the Apostle John uses to begin his Gospel. ‘In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ The Greek word here used, is ‘Logos’ meaning all knowledge and referring to Jesus He was with God and He was God. Jesus IS LIVING! He is ALIVE! And equating Him to the sharpened blade of a two-edged sword, just means that mankind has attempted to cloud the issue of sin with a justified spirit. Jesus cut through the cloud and showed the complete separation of sin to righteousness. No more trying to justify our actions.

 As to the soul and spirit; The soul is the essence of who we are, personally. The spirit is that which can connect us to God. We have a sin nature and the Word cuts through and divides our soul and spirit from the sin nature we possess. (I am presenting a six page description written by noted Bible scholar Lehman Strauss regarding the tripartite makeup of man.)

 This also divides man from man, as the righteous are removed from the unrighteous. This is the sinew and bone, the physical make-up of man. So, we have the spiritual side of man and the physical part of man and now the thought process of man. It cuts to the evil thoughts of the heart, which could also relate to the soul.

 3] “*And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.”*

 The one thing all can agree on, is the ‘omnipresence’ of God. Mankind fails to recognize the greatness and vastness of God. We want to treat God as a buddy, a pal, who is there at our beck and call. But friends, God is Omnipotent, all powerful, all knowing, all present. He created all things seen and unseen. Even as we look through the Hubble Telescope, we still cannot see the farthest reaches of the universe, yet He created it all.

 WE WILL give an account before Him when we are called. What kind of an account will we have? Nothing can be hidden from God because as well as seeing all things present, He sees all things we can’t see. He even sees our hearts and know the very thoughts we have. There is that spirit connection, don’t you think?

 D] Hebrews 4: 14 through 16; (read)

 1] “*Seeing then, that we have a great High Priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.”*

 Here we have the High Priest, who performs the atonement duties and acts as intermediary between mankind and God the Father, Jesus then IS our High Priest. He has come from the heavens to be man and returned to the heavens to sit at God’s right hand, With that understanding, the writer tells the people, if you have made your confession of faith, hang onto that with all diligence, and strength. You make that confession because you come to believe, and in that belief you make that confession, exercise that belief. The more you exercise your faith, the stronger it will get.

 2] “*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, but without sin.”*

 Here the writer points to the humanity of Jesus, who was in every way man, and tempted in every way. Frankly, I am sure He hungered, was tired, felt sorrow as well as happiness, and maybe felt pain as He might have stubbed His toe on a stone. We know He felt frustration and anger as we saw Him in the Temple outer court thrashing the money-changers and the sales stalls. But because of this, He understood our flaws and sin nature. However, throughout all this He never sinned.

 3] “*Let us therefore, come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

 Think of this, friends. We have that High Priest who DOES understand and because of this we can come to the Father in heaven in all confidence, because as High Priest He has interceded for us. The writer tells the people there, despite their weaknesses, come to the High Priest full well knowing that THIS High Priest went through all they are going through and fully understands what they are going through and will, through the Father, give them the Grace to deal with the pain and frustrations they are going through.