



Sermon-Based Study Guide
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Sermon Title: Danger, God's Word at Work!

Sermon Text: Hebrews 4.11-13
Related Texts: Isaiah 55.1-11; Genesis 32.22-32

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

What is your reaction to hearing someone make the claim that God spoke to them?

II. Introduction

The fourth chapter of Hebrews focuses upon the concept of entering into God's "rest." The author issues a severe warning in the first verse "...let us be careful that none of you is found to have fallen short of it (rest)." This warning reiterates the warnings of 3.8 and 3.12 to not allow distrust to harden one's heart and to not turn from the living God they have come to know in Jesus Christ. Instead the Hebrews are encouraged to enter God's rest – to enter into God's promises through trusting obedience (faith) to God that results in confidence, perseverance, hope, and joy. The exhortation continues in this passage where we read in verse 11, "let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest..."

III. Study the Context – Read Hebrews 4.11-13

- 1) Verse 11 turns once again to the exhortation to be faithful to God and to "make every effort to enter that rest." In the context of Hebrews this is an exhortation to Christians, who are being pressured to abandon their faith in Jesus, to remain faithful and to persevere in their trust in Jesus, God's Anointed One. What things might be involved in "making every effort" to remain faithful to Jesus? What kind of effort does your faith and willingness to be obedient to Jesus require?
- 2) It is amazing to look at verses 12 and 13 – two short verses – and find in them a tremendous amount of content and meaning. These verses follow the exhortation to make every effort to persevere and to enter God's rest and present a compelling reason to do so. The author begins with the affirmation that "the word of God is living and active." When the writer refers to the "word of God," to what is he referring?

Note: The phrase "word of God" presents a significant reality which is that God has spoken and has revealed the character, attributes, activity and purposes of God. The author of Hebrews recognizes God's word in the scriptures (did you notice how Psalm 95 is repeatedly cited as God speaking through David?). The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is, in the mind of the author of Hebrews, God's word written. Another dimension of God's Word (notice the capital W) is Jesus. John 1.1-14 develops the theological understanding that Jesus is God's Word incarnate – in human flesh. Jesus embodies the "logos" of God which is the mind, thought, word, and reason of God and reveals those things fully. We can

readily relate these two ideas – God’s word written conveys and reveals God’s being and the word written points to Jesus, the living Word of God.

- 3) Take a look at Isaiah 55.1-11. How does God reveal –through the prophet Isaiah – the power and efficacy of God’s word? How does this help you understand the meaning of Hebrews 4.12 that God’s word is “living and active?”
- 4) The author draws upon the imagery of a two-edged sword – a common weapon of the Roman army. Two kinds of swords were used – one was a long sword and the other more like a large dagger. How does the imagery of the sword piercing and dividing further describe how the word/Word of God is living and active? How does God’s word/Word judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (or “inner person”)?

Note: This verse suggests the sword being less of a weapon for warfare and more like a scalpel that cuts deeply within human beings. That word speaks to a person’s entire self – psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual. It addresses the whole person to encourage, to convict of sin, to instruct and correct, to guide, to inform, and to allow that intimate conversation with God in which we hear God’s voice speaking to us.

- 5) Verse 13 includes two important words. One is translated “uncovered.” God sees everything in all creation – sees you and me, inside and out. The other is translated “laid bare.” The Greek word comes from wrestling matches and describes a wrestler being grabbed by his opponent and thrown to the ground. The author suggests that God’s word uncovers us (left naked, uncovered before God) and wrestles us to the ground (figuratively) or “overthrows” us “before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.” What, in the context of verse 4.11, is God judging?

Note: The author points out that God is seeing, laying bare, grabbing hold through the agency of God’s living and active word and urges the Hebrews to grab hold of God - obeying God’s word, trusting in God’s promises, and persevering in God’s power.

IV. Apply It –Reflect and Respond

- 1) How has God spoken to you through the word written or the voice of the living Word?
- 2) How could the lack of familiarity with God’s word and too much familiarity with God’s word prevent a person from hearing God speak? What steps can you take to more regularly read and reflect on scripture in order to hear God speak to you?
- 3) In Genesis 32.22-32 Jacob wrestles with God’s messenger and grabs hold of that being, holding on until he obtains God’s blessing. How do you “hold on” to God? To God’s word? Do you ever find yourself wrestling with God and actively seeking to hear God’s voice in order to enter into God’s rest?

The word of God turns wandering human beings into principal actors in the magnificent story of divine redemption, transforms frightened people who want to hide and make excuses into holy partners of Jesus Christ who can – through him – stand up boldly and render an account.

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