

FIX OUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS

(The Way to Enter God's Rest)

Hebrews 3:1-4:13

Key Verse: 3:1

“Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.”

Chapter one reveals that Jesus is the Son of God who is superior to angels. Chapter two explains that Jesus is the Son of Man, who became fully human in order to become the pioneer of our salvation and our merciful and faithful high priest. Now, chapter three tells us that Jesus is greater than Moses and how we should respond to Jesus in order to enter God's rest. A most serious issue for contemporary people is that they have no rest in their hearts. Though they enjoy the latest technology, and unprecedented levels of material prosperity and entertainment, their hearts are more restless than ever. People are anxious, frustrated, nervous, fearful and desperate. According to the National Institute of Health, over 40 million Americans have anxiety disorders. More than 30,000 commit suicide annually. This is now the third highest cause of death for those ages 15-24, and the second highest among those ages 25-34.¹² Of course, the vast majority of people do not fall into these categories. Still, so many suffer from distress, fatigue, depression, emptiness, and a sense of guilt. These days Restless Legs Syndrome affects ten percent of our people.³ It is a creeping, nervous sensation in the legs that occurs primarily at night when people are trying to relax. How can we be free from all kinds of anxiety and stress and have rest in our hearts? Today's passage teaches us how to enter God's rest. The word “rest” appears thirteen times in this passage. This rest is deep rest for our souls that comes from entering God's rest. This rest is available today. This rest comes when we fix our thoughts on Jesus and trust him from our hearts. Let's learn how to enter God's rest.

First, acknowledge Jesus as our apostle and high priest (3:1-6). Verse 1a says, **“Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly**

¹ <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=21466&page=2>

² http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/10LCID_All_Deaths_By_Age_Group_2010-a.pdf

³ http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/restless_legs/detail_restless_legs.htm

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calling...." In the past we were unholy, ugly and wretched. But now we have been sanctified by Christ's atoning work. So we became members of God's holy family. Furthermore, we have been called from heaven into the presence of God. Becoming a Christian is not a light matter, but a truly great blessing. Receiving this blessing is one thing. Maintaining this blessing is another. The author teaches us how we can maintain this blessing in verse 1b: **"...fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest."** We must fix our thoughts on Jesus. Here Jesus is called our **"apostle and high priest."** This is a summary of what was explained in chapters 1 and 2. The word **"apostle,"** means **"sent by God."** It uniquely applies to Jesus, whom God sent to fulfill salvation work. Jesus is the supreme apostle, from whom all other apostles derive their authority. Jesus is also our high priest who represents us in the presence of God. When we acknowledge this Jesus before people, he acknowledges us before the Father in heaven (Mt 10:32). The word **"acknowledge"** can also be translated **"confess."** For the Hebrews, this confession was made publicly in a hostile environment. It was not a light matter for them; it was a matter of life and death. They had endured persecution, great conflicts, and much suffering, and yet they held on to their confession (10:32-33). Now, to maintain their commitment to Jesus, they needed to fix their thoughts on Jesus.

What, then, does it mean to fix our thoughts on Jesus? Here the words **"fix your thoughts on"** are also translated **"consider attentively."** It is to give our minds exclusively to think about who Jesus is and what he has done. In other words, it is to meditate on Jesus' person and work. In our society today, time is at a premium. Everyone says, "I am too busy." So they feel hurried and rushed and think they have no time for quiet meditation on Jesus. As a result their understanding of spiritual truth becomes very shallow. Such people become like the seed sown on rocky soil which does not take root. For a while they seem to flourish. But when trial and hardship comes they fall away. In order to take root and to grow to maturity, meditating on Jesus is necessary. These days Eastern forms of meditation are popular with Americans. Tired of the empty materialism and rationalism of Western culture, they are seeking some kind of mystical experience and a deeper quality of life. So they meditate on some mantra or image. They empty their minds and gain a general feeling of well-being. However, the end result is that they are detached from reality, devoid of moral clarity, and resigned. This

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kind of self-seeking meditation is very different from meditating on Jesus. So we must take seriously who or what we meditate on. For example, if we meditate on the lives of rich people, we become selfish, deceptive, greedy and mean. If we meditate on the works of Nietzsche, we fall into nihilism. Many who meditated on the works of Schopenhauer fell into depression and committed suicide. Other human beings are too shallow to be the focus of our meditation. They are all limited and imperfect. But Jesus is infinite and perfect—he is deeper than the ocean and more beautiful than any works of art. When we meditate on Jesus we can come into the presence of the living God. We can find mercy and grace and real strength to help us overcome all kinds of difficulties. We can live meaningful, fruitful, victorious lives for the glory of God. This is how to maintain God's blessing.

In verses 2-6, the author compares and contrasts Jesus with Moses. Hebrew people were greatly influenced by Moses. To them, Moses was just under God and above the angels. In keeping with the theme of his letter the author helps them see the superiority of Jesus. This would help them fix their thoughts on Jesus. In verse 2, the author introduces the analogy of God's house and explained how Moses and Jesus were faithful to the one who appointed them. Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, shepherded them for forty years in the wilderness, bearing all of their sins and weaknesses as a nurse carries an infant, and led them to the door of the Promised Land (Nu 11:12). So God said of Moses, **"...he is faithful in all my house"** (Nu 12:7b). Jesus was appointed to lead those who believe in him out of the bondage of the devil and into God's rest. Jesus, though he is the Son of God, was faithful to finish what God gave him to do: to teach the Bible, to raise disciples, to save mankind from our sins even to his death on the cross (Php 2:6-8). In verses 3-6, the author described how Jesus was superior to Moses. Moses was a temporary servant, whereas Christ is the eternal Son. Moses was a servant in God's house, but Jesus is the builder of God's house. Moses' works shadowed salvation; as a witness, he pointed to the Messiah (Dt 18:15). Jesus, the Messiah, is the reality of salvation. So the implication for them was that to return to Moses was going from greater to lesser; it was to abandon the eternal in favor of the temporary. For us, it can be returning to former religious practices after meeting Christ. This is why we have to fix our thoughts on Jesus. Verse 6b says, **"And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory."** We Christians

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are God's house. We are his dwelling place and his treasured possession. This is true for those who hold firmly to their faith in Jesus and the hope of the kingdom of God, which is our glory. This faith and hope enables us to persevere through all trials. Let's hold on to our faith and hope in Jesus.

Second, a lesson from Israel's history (3:7-19). After explaining that Jesus is greater than Moses, the author warns us not to harden our hearts like the Israelites did. He began by quoting the Holy Spirit's words in Psalm 95:7-11. The key phrases are the first and last verses: **"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts,"** and **"They shall never enter my rest."** He later repeats and develops these phrases. The author of this Psalm was David (4:7). In the first part of Psalm 95, David praises the Creator God and Shepherd of his people, and exhorts us to come to him in thanksgiving and worship. Then he warns that today, when we hear God's voice, we should not harden our hearts. He illustrates this with two examples of Israel's failures, which are found in Exodus 17 and Numbers 13-14, respectively. In the first event, they were in the desert and were thirsty and could not find water; they felt their lives were in danger. In this situation, they should remember what God had done for them and ask for his help. Instead, they complained bitterly, out of their habit, saying, **"Why did you bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and our livestock die of thirst?"** God did not punish them right away, but graciously provided fresh water out of the rock. Moses called that place "Massah," which means "testing," and "Meribah," which means "rebellion." The author of Hebrews simply says "rebellion." They quarreled with Moses and complained to him, but actually it came from their rebellion against God. This rebellion reveals their root problem of unbelief. They should have repented, but they did not. As a result, it remained unsolved and led to serious consequences in the next event. When God exposes our inner problems, we should repent, even though God does not punish us right away, recognizing God's love and patience (Ro 2:4). Otherwise, this problem leads to more serious consequences later. That is what happened to the people of Israel.

In the second event, they were at the border of the Promised Land. Moses chose twelve tribal leaders to spy out the land and bring back a report. These leaders all saw the same reality, but their reports were quite different. Two leaders, Caleb and Joshua, gave a positive and encouraging report (Nu

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14:9b). However, ten leaders spread a bad report among the people (Nu 13:32b-33). They overestimated enemies and underestimated themselves. They did not look at God, who is living and almighty, but only at the reality. They did not remember God's promise and trust God. Rather, they fell into fear and despair and gave up. They wanted to return to their former lives as slaves in Egypt. Their negative reports overpowered the positive reports and captured the hearts of the people of Israel. Then the whole nation fell into fear and rebelled against God. The consequence was very serious. God was so angry that he did not allow them to enter the Promised Land. They wandered in the desert for forty years and died, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. David explained why God was so angry in verses 10-11. God said, **"Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"** They failed, not because of one or two mistakes, but because their hearts were always going astray.

Through this example from Israel's history, what lessons can we learn? First of all, we learn not to have a sinful, unbelieving heart (12). This leads to a serious result, which is to turn away from the living God. God alone is the source of life. If we turn away from him we have no life. Unbelief is the most serious heart disease. Those who are sick with unbelief are always complaining and unthankful. Moreover, they spread their disease to others, produce mistrust, and make others sick to death like them. On the other hand, those who trust God are always full of life and thanksgiving and joy. They give a good influence to others. Second of all, we learn to encourage one another daily, so that we may not be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (13). Sin is deceitful. In the beginning it seems to be only fun with no bad consequences. But soon we find that the fun is gone and very painful results follow. If we had known this from the beginning we would be afraid to commit sin. So we need to encourage one another not to be deceived by sin, but to hold firmly to our original conviction to the very end (14). In verses 15-19, the author again quotes Psalm 95:7b-8 to emphasize the seriousness of unbelief. Sometimes we take unbelief lightly because it does not seem as serious as murder or adultery. But unbelief is a very serious sin. It is the sin that kept the exodus generation from entering the Promised Land.

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Third, the way to enter God's rest (4:1-13). In 3:7-19, the author introduced the words “**Today**” and “**my rest.**” Now he explains the meaning of these words in more detail. If we can understand what these words mean, we can get the main point of his message. In verses 1-6 he mainly talks about the meaning of entering God's rest. Verse 1 tells us that the promise of entering God's rest still stands. “**Still stands**” means that it is still available. To whom is it available? It is only available to those who believe the good news. If one hears the good news, but does not respond with the obedience that comes from faith, it is of no value to him (2). But when we believe the good news we can enter into God's rest (3a). Verses 3b-4 tell us how God rested on the seventh day after completing his work of creation. God did not rest because he was tired. God never grows tired or weary (Isa 40:28b). God's rest was to commemorate his creation work. God longs for mankind to have fellowship with him and appreciate what he has done. God did not withdraw his rest after the fall. God established the Sabbath day after the Exodus, and trained his people to keep it holy so that they may enter God's rest (Ex 20:8). God wanted them to cease regular work, come to God through his words, praise and worship him, and have fellowship with him and each other. However, they failed to enter God's rest through their disobedience (5-6). God's rest is not just taking a nap or relaxing after hard work. Even though we relax, we are still burdened with anxiety and guilt feelings. God's rest comes when believe in Jesus, receive the forgiveness of sins, and have fellowship with God. That's why Jesus invites us, “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest**” (Mt 11:28). Only God's rest satisfies our souls. So Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

From verses 7-10, the author explains the meaning of “**Today.**” When God spoke through David in Psalm 95, he set a certain day, calling it “**Today**” (7). It pointed to something better than the rest they had enjoyed when Joshua led them into the Promised Land (8). God's Sabbath rest, which he established at creation, still remains for the people of God (9). Now anyone who believes in Jesus can enter God's rest. We can taste God's rest while in this world, but the real fulfillment will come when we enter the presence of God in heaven. After finishing our works on earth, we will enjoy eternal rest with Jesus (10; Rev 14:13). Here the word “**Today**” is significant. What does “**Today**” mean? It means today—not yesterday or tomorrow, but today. The

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events in Exodus and Numbers were past events. But when David wrote Psalm 95, those events came alive to his readers. In the same way, when the author of Hebrews wrote his letter, they came alive to his audience and gave a warning against unbelief. There are so many events in the Bible. Though they happened in the past, they still speak to us today. That is why Paul said, **“These things have been written down as warnings for us”** (1Co 10:11). So today, when we study the Bible, we need to listen to God's words very carefully; we are having a conversation with God himself.

Finally, in verse 11, the author exhorts us, saying, **“Let us, then, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.”** This is an exhortation to enter God's rest by faith, not a call to earn one's salvation by works. In verses 12-13 he gives us two reasons why we have to pay serious attention to this exhortation. The first, in verse 12, has to do with God's word, and the second, in verse 13, has to do with God himself. In Hebrews, **“the word of God”** usually refers to the message of salvation, that is, the gospel (2:3). But here it refers not only to the gospel, but to all the words spoken by God. God is living, so his word is living and active, and it endures forever (1Pe 1:25). It is sharp, discerning and piercing. The word of God diagnoses the human heart. It penetrates to the depth of one's being, exposing subconscious thoughts and desires and judging based on God's truth. Nothing is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2Co 5:10). We cannot escape, and there is no excuse before God and his word. This is God working through his words. When we encounter God through Bible reading, messages, and testimonies, we should respond in faith and obedience.

Today God is still speaking to us. When God speaks to us we have to take his word seriously. To accept and obey God's word is the way of entering God's rest. Let's fix our thoughts on Jesus and enter God's rest.