

HEBREWS 4, 9-16.

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Notes of an Address by Mr. W.J. Hocking.
19th February 1933.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is one in which the children of God are viewed as passing through this world onwards to that which is bright, blessed, glorious and permanent. There are other epistles that give the standing of the believer in Christ Jesus, settled and sure; justified just as much now as we ever shall be in glory. All that depends upon the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ is stable, steadfast and secure to every believer, through grace. But it is true as a matter of fact, as a matter of revelation, that the children of God are not yet entered into the rest of God.

They have rest, certainly, such as our Lord spoke of when He said "Come unto Me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That rest He gives, inward rest of the conscience, which is perfectly cleansed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and no more accuses the believer. And that is rest worth having to those who know what the accusings of an evil conscience are.

But there is a rest of which this epistle speaks, which is the rest of God; a rest in which God participates Himself, and in which, through His marvellous grace, He has called us who believe to participate also. And that is the rest that remains for the people of God spoken of in the verse that I first read.

It is a rest that is to come; a rest which might be gathered over from the Old Testament, because we do read of a rest at the beginning of the history of this

world, when God in six days furnished the earth for the habitation of man. And He rested, beholding His works, that they were all very good. It was a perfection which He saw, and which in His infinite mind He could appreciate, and He rested in His work.

But sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and God could no longer rest. That rest of God was broken by the advent of sin into the world. God is righteous; sin is opposed to His holy nature. God could not rest beholding the unrest of man, dominated by an evil will, assembling themselves against God. And God therefore spoke of another rest.

He spoke of a rest in connection with His people whom He redeemed out of Egypt, the people of Israel. They were called to go into the land of Canaan, and there to find a rest. But Joshua, who was commissioned of God to lead the people across Jordan to subdue the idolatrous nations that were there, he was unable to give them rest. There was cessation from conflict, but there was no rest. There was idolatry in Canaan, and God could not rest. And the apostle shows from the Psalms that God some six centuries or so afterwards spoke of another rest, "Today, after so long a time." And the witness of the Spirit was that God's rest did not come about through the victories of Joshua. There was something yet to come. And so in this scripture it speaks of a rest God will enter into, and into which He will bring those who trust in Him, and who have faith in Him.

In the 3rd chapter we find that God brings to their remembrance the history of Israel, whom He brought out of Egypt to bring them into the rest of Canaan. They started out of Egypt, and were all well on the way. They came to the Red Sea, but they did not cross the Jordan. They fell in the wilderness. Their carcasses were there, a witness, every one of them, not to the grace of God, but to His righteousness, and to their failure.

But what was their failure? Their failure was unbelief. They did not trust God. They had seen His works in the house of bondage. They had seen His mighty power at the Red Sea. They had seen His victory over Pharaoh and his hosts. As they passed through the desert their hearts failed them, and they lost their trust in God, and they fell - monuments of unbelief.

And the apostle turns to this, and he bids them "Fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

Now, beloved friends, we often do not realise that what God is allowing is for our profit all through the different circumstances. These men started from Egypt to go to Canaan, but they fell in the wilderness, and God's Holy Spirit quotes the incident as a warning to us. We have the grace, we have the hope, we have the assurance, but we are to beware, we are to be warned by the terrible example of these Israelites that fell in the wilderness.

Do you say that you are better than

they? Do you say there is less fear that you should fail in your trusting than in theirs? If you say so, you know not your own heart, and you despise the truth of God. There is that fear in connection with every one of us. God puts us on our responsibility. He has His grace, He has His power, He has His resources; but you have your responsibility, and I have mine.

And what is it I have to fear? Must I fear God? No! Fear God Who brought me out of Egypt! Fear God Who loved me, and by His beloved Son atoned for the sin of my soul! Who then shall I fear? I fear myself, speaking of fear as an utter lack of trust. I can trust absolutely the infinite God; I cannot trust my own heart for one instant. The person who is vainly trusting to his own heart to get through this wilderness, who is putting any confidence in his flesh, is in danger of falling after the same example of unbelief.

That rest is before us; we have not entered into it. God can bring us in, and establish us there. But there is something that must be maintained in your heart and mine, and that is faith and piety. There was a danger of their falling through unbelief, and the apostle says in the 11th verse "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest."

Let us be perfectly clear. I say to our young friends, what does this verse mean? Does it mean that I have to labour to get myself in the many mansions on high? Have I to work myself up to a standard of holiness? Have I to collect a fund of good

works, and therefore fit myself for entrance into the glory beyond? Is that what I have to labour for? If I am labouring for that, I shall never accomplish it. But still there is this scripture. Those who are labouring by their own good works to fit themselves for God's presence now have overlooked entirely the assurance of God's word that the believer has everlasting life, that his sins are forgiven, that He is justified before God, and he stands in His favour. We have not to labour to do these things.

But we have to labour in order to enter into that rest that is beyond, to get into the state of glory that is yet to come. You see the apostle says "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works." What are the works, then? What are the works which constitute our labour in which we have to be diligent? They are works of grace; the fruits of God's Holy Spirit working in our souls. Those are the things to which we have to give our attention. If the heart is set in faith upon God, the works follow as a matter of course. There is the energy which displays itself in a likeness to Christ; the display of His holy mind, His likeness, His activity of grace to others, the mercy which He shows. All these flow out from the heart that by faith is fixed upon God and upon His Son. It is the true work of faith which shows itself in activity.

The scripture came before us this afternoon "Faith that worketh by love." Faith is not quiescent. Faith without

works is dead. Faith is a living activity, and its activity is in works which are true to God, and according to His own grace. And it is our business to be about them in order that we may enter into that rest, working by faith, and working in the way of love. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and to love God, and to love one's neighbour as oneself is the summing up of the law. And this we have to do, and a great deal more.

But there is a solemn adjuration that we are to labour to enter into that rest lest anyone fall after the same example of unbelief. Perhaps there is someone here that feels a certain amount of trepidation. They say, well, it is a great task. I have been bought, I have simply to do nothing to enter into heaven, I shall get there somehow, no effort on my part. Here is a scripture that we are to labour, to give diligence, to put our whole soul into this business of getting into the rest, and never to follow the example of them who fell through unbelief in the wilderness.

Well, now, if there is any difficulty about it, the solution is provided, and that solution is in the provision that God has made. There is a double provision, the word of God, and the great High Priest. You see, if we were left to our own notions about these things, or the instructions that we receive from others, or even the example that we see of other good people about us, we should very often be puzzled to know what to do. There is no one who can carve out the path in life for another individual, and God's purpose

is required, and individual faith is required above all things in the christian life. But there is one thing which God has given which is of the utmost interest for us; which is the essence, so to speak, of our very life as believers, and that is the word of God.

I want to read a scripture from the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses is there referring the people of Israel to the history of their own experiences, brought out through the wilderness, not yet in the promised land, but he speaks in the 1st verse of going in to possess the land. And he says "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

There we get God's purpose of bringing them into the wilderness, and God's provision for them in the wilderness. They might have got into the land of Canaan in a very short time, yet they were forty years in the wilderness. Why were

they there? The reason was because of their unbelief. When they got near the land they sent spies, and the spies reported great cities walled up to the heavens, huge warriors, strong men, difficulties on every hand confronting them. The heart of the people failed. Why? They looked at the enemy; they looked at the fortified cities; they looked at themselves; and they said "We are no match for these." Where was their faith? Where was their God, the God Who had broken down the power of Egypt? It was their unbelief. And God allowed them to wander forty years in the wilderness that they might be humbled, that they might trust in themselves no longer, that they might learn that if they wanted to keep on they must look away from themselves, and look to God.

Do you feel what it is to be humbled, and dependent upon God? He fed them with manna in the wilderness, and gave them water from the rock, but they had to depend upon Him. He led them out, and if they wanted to move they must move at His word. It was a silent word, too, for the Ark was placed in the centre of the encampment, and went before them, and their only safety was to follow the Ark, and encamp round the Ark when they rested. And so they needed the word of God every moment. They needed His promise to lead them. They needed His promise to clothe them; during the forty years their garments never failed, and their feet never swelled. How God cared for them, yet they fell in unbelief.

You see the glory of God's grace; you see the miserable doubting hearts that you and I have! Oh beloved friends, God's word is of infinite importance to us, to save our souls from a great many humiliating circumstances. God means to show us that in us, in our flesh, there is no good thing - you read it in the scriptures. Oh, if I could only get hold of that truth in its real meaning to me, well you and I might be saved from many a bitter experience in life. Those who trust in their flesh, they do something in an activity of their own, and they suffer. God deals with them; they suffer and suffer for their own foolishness and their own wilfulness, when the word of God might have saved them from it.

God has given us His word that we might know ourselves, not by experience, but be prevented from going into that which might lead us astray. How many a young christian has dabbled with the world, has been lured by the attractions of the world which seemed so innocent, so lacking in harm and danger. And so, regardless of the word of God, they go until their wings are singed. They do not know what they are doing, but they might have known it. The word of God is living. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life," said the Lord Jesus.

And how true it was; how His word came home and discovered to them what they were. Read that affecting scene in the last chapter of John, and see how the word of the Lord Jesus Christ penetrated the heart of His follower; so ardent in his love for

the Lord Jesus Christ, yet down in his heart there was the same lacking - trust in himself. He was trusting in himself, so afterwards the Lord spoke to him, and proved his heart. "Lovest thou Me more than these?" That was just what he did because he was trusting in himself. The Lord wanted him to know the truth about himself, and so the words came to him, and they tore aside the veil from his heart. "Lord, Thou knowest all things - Thou knowest." He left it there. He did not say any more about himself, because he felt he could not trust himself, but he could trust his Lord.

And the word of God gives us such experiences as these. If you only shut yourself up to the word of God, and let it shine as a searchlight upon your soul, you will find that you learn from it what you really are, and what you are in danger from, and so you may escape a dozen snares. God has given us the word for this. He has given us a word which is a power.

Now it was in the wilderness that we find our Lord Jesus Christ Himself using the scripture that I have read in His temptation. The Lord Jesus, after His baptism in Jordan, was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. There He was with wild beasts forty days and nights. He suffered hunger, and He was tempted of Satan. And the Lord felt what it was to be there. He felt the pangs of hunger, and Satan knew that He felt it, and his suggestion at the end of the forty days, after the long, long vigil of waiting,

waiting, day by day, "If Thou be the Son of God, make these stones bread." What was said forty days ago at Jordan? "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." Satan said "If Thou be the Son of God, make these stones bread - feed Thyself." The Lord replied "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that he receives out of the mouth of God." And so His faith was perfect, His trust was absolute. He gained the victory. He found His strength, His support, and the sustenance of His soul and spirit in His trust in the living God. He was perfect as a Man in His trust, and so there He gained the victory. And it was the word of God which came as a support and help at that very time, and so it was throughout the temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have this word of God also for our guidance and help in the wilderness. It is a powerful word, living, it has energy of its own. It works in its own silent way, for surely that is the meaning of it. We have the same expression in Thessalonians "The word which worketh in you that believe," and so it is. My response puts the word of God into my heart, and if I put the power of the word of God into my memory, into my life, it will there work as a living thing for my benefit.

It is a power, but it is not only a sustaining power. There is also a discovering power with it; it reveals, it penetrates, it goes within. We, as a rule, are content with what is on the surface of things. Well, it will pass muster, and we are apt to be contented in that way with

our own exercises, our prayer. We bow the knee, the moments pass, we rise. Have we prayed? Has it been a real prayer? What does the word of God say about it? Has it come from the heart? Has it come from what is within? Have the deep springs of our nature gone out in supplication to God? That is what the word of God sets before us.

You see the word of God goes down to the very recesses of our being. It penetrates; it is a two-edged sword; it divides even to separating soul and spirit. It is a sword here not of judgment. John saw a two-edged sword proceeding out of the mouth of the Lord in glory - it was the sword of judgment, judging the nations. Here it is the sword, or the sacrificial knife, perhaps, which was used by the priest in slaughtering and cutting up the victim for sacrifice; slaying it and opening it for inspection, so that the very recesses of the sacrifice were exposed to view. If any defect was there it was made manifest.

So it must be, and believe me that is how it must be with us. His word tears aside every covering. He would have everything out. You may depend upon it that if you seek to get through this world under cover, under concealment, covering yourself with some cloak or other, one day it will be torn aside; it may not be in this world, but it will most certainly be before the judgment seat of Christ, because everybody will be manifested there; they will be seen in their true colours, their true nature. You have got the word of God,

and this word of God is able to do it. It is in my hands and in your hands.

It is one thing to search the Bible; it is another thing for the Bible to search us. That is what we have here, the soul and spirit, those intimate parts of man's nature, there they are, the word of God separates them. The soul, that which takes hold of things in this world; the spirit, that which takes hold of the things of God. The word of God discriminates between them, and it penetrates even to the joints and marrow. It is the same channels, they are all separated by the word of God. And it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

You notice an interesting thing. In the 12th verse it speaks of the word of God in a personal way. It is spoken of as if it were live and active. It was a personal word, but it is surely the written word only. In the 13th verse we get the One Who is behind the word of God. When I read the word of God, God is speaking to me, and that, young believer, is necessary that you should remember. You go on your knees, and you speak to God. You open your Bible, and God speaks to you. He has something to say to you. It is for you to hear and receive it.

And so in the 13th verse we have God spoken of "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do." The word of God makes it a manifest thing. All things are naked. There is the skin of the

sacrifice taken off and opened - that is the carcass of the animal, divided into pieces, and carefully inspected by the official eyes of the priest. And so it is with ourselves. Our outward ways and circumstances are come under review in the scriptures, and the plans and purposes of our hearts, too, they are judged by God's holy word.

Beloved friends, it is a good thing to have very short accounts, as someone has said, with God; to bring our ways under the inspection of God; to invite Him by His word to search us, and see whether there is any wicked way in us. There may be some poisonous canker working in your life. It may be secret to you now, but if it is not discovered, if you do not get rid of it, your life may be wrecked, testimony gone; you may fall into unbelief. How many young brothers, promising lads, have been wrecked with one look back, gone astray. And what is the cause of it? It is that which you have in you, I have in me. The word of God shows it, and if we judge it in the light of God, I am sure we pass into the promised land with the joy and fortitude of Joshua.

Now we come to the great High Priest. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." Notice the expression "Let us hold fast." The 1st verse was "Let us fear." The 11th verse was "Let us labour." The 14th verse was "Let us hold fast our profession." Why? Jesus, the Son of God. You see the figure, don't you? Here we are travelling on to our rest, the rest

remaining to the people of God. God has been warning us, challenging us to give care, fear, hold fast. Now He says "Hold fast." Why? Because there, in that glorious place, there in that rest, there seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, is Jesus, the Son of God, our great High Priest. We look at ourselves, and we are filled with lamentations and woes; it is inevitable, we must surely fail. We look there, we see the great High Priest is there - Jesus. Oh, we hold fast now, because we have got someone to hold us fast, and if He holds us fast then we can hold very fast indeed.

But let us hold fast the confession of our faith, and that is that we have done with this world, and that we are going on towards that rest that remains to the people of God. That is our profession. Our face is towards the Canaan of God, and we are going to hold fast to that. We are going to keep our eyes on that Great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God.

There is comfort in this; it is meant to be so; it is meant that our hearts should be cheered. We shall not talk about returning to Egypt, being in the wilderness. We see there Jesus, the Son of God. There is my great High Priest, and He has passed through the wilderness. "In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, ye may be also." He is our great High Priest, One Who understands

us, Who has Himself been through the wilderness of this world, and is passed through the heavens.

The tabernacle of old was a little picture in this way; there was the court of the tabernacle where the altar of the burnt offering was, that was the first. Then there was the holy place, and then there was the most holy place. And on the great day of atonement you might see the High Priest with the burnt offering. You would see him at the golden altar, and then, as far as the tabernacle went, you could not see him. He passed out of the court, through the holy place into the most holy place, beyond the veil. Now the veil is rent, and we see that Jesus, the Son of God, has passed through the heavens. He has gone through the wilderness of this world. He has gone through the heavens that are above into the heaven of heavens itself, into the presence of God, and He is there for us. We have someone Who is in the very highest place possible, and He is our Saviour, Jesus, Jesus the Son of God.

It was Jesus Who was tempted. And He was tempted, as we noticed just now, on that very point of being the Son of God. And it is because He was tempted He is such a suitable High Priest for us. But there is the fact, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession is there, and it is for us to consider Him for our comfort. He is passed through the heavens.

And the scripture says that He is One able to sympathise with us. We have need of a High Priest who can sympathise with

our infirmities, Who was in all points tempted like you and me, apart from sin.

Now that is a great mercy, and something beyond which the believing Hebrew would know or gather from his historical knowledge of the high priests of old, who were men of like passions to ourselves. There was Aaron, the first high priest. What did he do? He made a golden calf for all the people to worship. He started very very badly indeed. That was Aaron. Then there was Eli. What kind of a sympathising high priest was he? Hannah came up to the temple. What sympathy had he for her? Had he any heart to feel for her at all? He had no idea what was in her mind as her lips moved in silent prayer before Jehovah. He said "The woman is drunk." Annas and Caiaphas, what were they? What sympathy had they with the unfortunate, with those that were in distress? Did they ever have such a friendless one before them as Jesus of Nazareth? Did any spark of pity touch the hearts of either of these two men when Jesus was before them? Had they any regard for Him. Oh, how truly they failed, men of like passions to ourselves.

We have a High Priest that can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, and knows exactly the condition of our hearts. He knows the weight of the burden. He knows our weakness. He knows how we try, try, try, and how we fail because we trust in ourselves. He is our sympathising High Priest. He intercedes for us. Jesus, the Son of God, sympathises.

Sometimes it may not seem so; so Mary

and Martha felt when Jesus tarried so long away from them. Yet we know that that heart was touched with the feeling of their bereavement. He counted their tears, and measured their sorrows. And when He came, oh how He groaned in spirit. He shed tears, not just a few solitary ones down His blessed face; He shed tears and wept, showing how sympathising He was with them.

And He was the Son of God who has passed through the heavens, bearing the burdens of all who will trust God. What are we in comparison with the millions of His sons upon the earth? He knows them all, and bears them all, and He is going to bring us to that rest. Are we going to trust Him? We cannot trust ourselves, but we can trust Him, Jesus the Son of God. "Of those Thou hast given Me I have lost none."

We have this comfort, that He is there sympathising with us. You say, I did not think of that. That is exactly where we fail. You do not think about it; you do not believe it. You see faith makes the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ real to us, and when a great shock comes to our life, then we say "Well, I can trust the Lord. He knows what has come upon me, and He is going to give me strength for it." That is faith. If I say I forgot it, that is a lack of faith altogether. We must beware lest we fall into it in the example of unbelief.

Well, there it is. He is there; He was in all points tempted like we are. It does not merely mean that He experienced

every circumstance through which we pass; He did more than that. He was face to face with the difficulties that we have, and far more. But the point is, the comfort to me is, that He is personally acquainted. Oh, what a catalogue we should make if we wrote down our difficulties and trials we are passing through! Well, the Lord knows them all, and He is able to bring us through.

He was tempted like as we are, only in connection with sin, there was no sin in Him. There is sin in us. He does not sympathise with our sins. Then if I sin the Lord is not for me? Now here again you lack faith. Did not Peter sin? Did He forsake Peter? "Peter, I have prayed for you. Satan wants to have you to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you." Peter's mouth was filled with oaths and curses. The Lord did not sympathise. He looked at him, but that was not sympathy.

Oh, the sympathies of Jesus! They are so infinite. Would to God we knew more and more about them, that our hearts might be comforted in this desert world through which we are passing.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We call this prayer. It is not called prayer in this verse, it is the fourth exhortation. If I may make a suggestion as to why it does not say prayer, I would say that it may be that very often when we come to the throne of grace, we have not a prayer in our hearts at all, we are so bowed down, we are so overcome by the

force of the difficulties, the adversity that is upon us, that we really do not know what to say, we do not know what to ask for. But let us come boldly to the throne of grace. The throne is the place of power. Jesus, the Son of God, passed through the heavens. He is there on the throne.

But then it is not the millennial throne. We are not coming to Solomon, we are coming to One who is on the throne of grace. Grace reigns on a righteous basis, reigns through righteousness. But it is grace, and that means favour for the undeserving, and we come in there exactly. We need grace as sinners who are far from God. And we need grace as undeserving children, is it not so, as undeserving pilgrims. Is there any deserving that God should exercise His power towards us? The children of Israel murmured in the wilderness, but God never stayed the rivers of water, nor the manna. There was always grace towards the undeserving.

And there, on the throne of grace, we find we obtain mercy. It says we get mercy - that is God's pity for us in our unfortunate state. We fail very miserably indeed, but God has mercy for us. We are on beds of sickness, and God has mercy upon sick men, and upon others too. They may feel charged with sorrow, just as much as they can bear; He does not put too much upon them, and we find that at the throne of grace.

You see, when we come to God, the

great moral value of it is this, that we only come into the presence of God with our wills in activity. When we come to God, it means that we come to Him, and do what is right in His sight. We are not stubborn, and therefore there is the assurance that we obtain mercy, and we find grace to help us in the time of our need.

So, dear friends, we have abundant and sufficient for us in our journey through the wilderness. God has taken great care that we shall have all we need, and much more, as we traverse the wilderness.

But I do feel that I should be lacking in my responsibility to you if I do not press upon everyone present tonight that we must take care, we must be warned, we must not be self sufficient, we must not be lifted up with pride and self satisfaction. We are dependent entirely on God, His mercy and His grace. If we feel that, then our souls will be in exercise of faith towards God, and God does love that we should trust Him.

Can you just trust God for all the details of your life in the wilderness?