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^A John 18:38, 17:17, Hebrews 1:1-2, John 6:68

^B Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16, 2 Peter 1:10-11

^C 2 Peter 1:21, Isaiah 55:11

^D John 12:47-48, Matthew 7:22-23

^E 1 John 2:25, John 16:8, 3:36; Deuteronomy 30:19

A. Introduction

1. Science

- a. for many, many years, science and the scientific method
 - (A) have been promoted as the final means of discovering truth
 - (B) in man's pursuit of knowledge
- b. but the choice and promotion of these is a humanistic religion
 - (A) it arises from an exaltation of man and his own ability
 - (B) it is advocated with religious fervour; science has become a god
- c. yet there has come in this same period a growing disillusionment
 - (A) science has failed to answer the deeper problems in our lives
 - (B) science has provided great physical benefits, but so very often these are perverted from doing good to doing evil
- d. so that a generation of graduates from schools and universities have emerged with an attitude
 - (A) distrustful of tradition and authority
 - (B) questioning everything and tolerating anything
 - (C) considering moral values as relative to the person and situation
 - (D) denying that there is any such thing as absolute truth

2. What Is Truth?

- a. Pilate asked of Jesus, in that interview in which he decided against truth for reasons of political expediency
 - (A) that same Jesus claims to His followers, that He is truth
 - (B) in Him, as the living word of God, truth is embodied
 - (C) Jesus was the representative of His Father; to whom He prayed: "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." (John 17:17)
 - (D) the book of Hebrews opens "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed

heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.” (Hebrews 1:1-2)

- b. the words that God has spoken, the living Word that He has sent; they are truth; and “Simon Peter answered Him (Jesus), Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)
- c. believing and obeying God’s words is the critical issue of our lives

B. What’s at Stake? 4:9

1. Last week (verse 9):

- a. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.
- b. we omitted to point out that this term, “Sabbath rest” does not mean
 - (A) keeping Sunday as a special day of rest (though God has created us so that we need that!)
 - (B) a temporal, earthly rest, even that of the Messianic kingdom
 - (C) the soul’s rest in having peace with God, although that is clearly a prerequisite
- c. rather we examined this “Sabbath rest” and discovered
 - (A) it is not limited to the Israelites entering the land of Canaan
 - (B) it encompasses all God’s people of both the OT & NT
 - (C) it is related to the seventh-day Sabbath rest being taken by God upon the completion of His creative work
 - (D) it is, though entered in the here and now, to be fully realised in the future by the believers joining God in His heavenly rest

2. Israel’s Example

- a. was given to show that the same things that prevented their entering their rest in Canaan, can prevent a person from entering God’s rest
 - (A) though they had seen the signs of God’s Presence every day, had beheld His miraculously delivering them out of Egypt
 - (B) yet, upon their reaching a rest stop at Rephidim, where there was no water, they tested God by asking, “Is the Lord really with us?”
 - (C) and upon reaching the border of Canaan, denied God’s promise by both their actions and words: “It is not safe for us to enter.”

- (D) so God swore they should not enter His rest
- b. respecting God's rest, the illustration of Israel's example teaches
 - (A) participation in God's rest is conditional: it depends upon our response of obedience and of faith to God
 - (B) that Israel's failure does not disannul the promise of God
 - (C) that promised rest still awaits, is still there for, God's people
- c. the Sabbath rest that remains is God's rest in heaven;
 - (A) how will a person respond to this promise? ... as Israel did, or not?
 - (B) for those who believe the promise, it is eternal life
 - (C) that is what is at stake ... eternal life

C. The Works of God and Man 4:10-11

1. Working Is Over (verse 10)

- a. "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."
 - (A) this can be understood of the Christian: that anyone who does enter into God's rest, does so because he has finished his earthly labours, just as God has finished His creative labours
 - (1) to which interpretation there is an element of truth, for to die and be with the Lord is in a sense an entrance into rest;
 - (2) but, as that rest of which Hebrews has been speaking, appears to be the consummation of God's purpose for His people, and that consummation awaits the resurrection from the dead, it is hard to speak of rest for us as being in the past tense
 - (B) the language is definite and it can be understood as speaking definitely of Jesus Christ, who, having finished His work on the cross, has ascended to the right hand of the majesty on high, and therefore has entered already – our forerunner – into that rest
 - (1) from which we can say on the one hand, that those who are in Christ by faith thereby enter that rest now
 - (2) and on the other hand, yet look forward to that rest upon Christ's return, when all believers will be taken to be with Him
 - (3) so we live in rest now by faith, and fully realise it hereafter

b. regardless of which of these is right, then the toil and labours which we experience in this world on account of sin will then be over

2. Labour unto this Rest (verse 11)

a. "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience."

- (A) the words 'be diligent' can also be translated 'be hasty' or 'be eager', or as in the AV, 'labour'
- (B) the writer of Hebrews frequently makes this point, that we are not to sit idly by awaiting for God to heap spiritual benefits onto our plate and then lift our spoons to our mouths to enjoy them
- (C) because, as on the Israelites road to the promised land, so also on our road to this promised rest, the enemy has laid many stumbling blocks to trip us up along the way – so we must be diligent

b. what is the nature of this diligence?

- (A) it certainly is not works of righteousness to earn our way along – "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20); Galatians 2:16 has the same and more to say on this
- (B) Christian assurance of salvation is not to be complaisance, the spoken or unspoken attitude of 'well now I am saved; I can just sit back and enjoy it;' the Bible counters that idea with such words as, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you." (2 Peter 1:10-11 NAS95)

c. be alert, therefore, to be faithful and obedient, taking your lesson from those Israelites who failed to enter their rest in Canaan

- (A) to do this we need to take heed
- (B) we need to learn the truth of the next two verses, ...

D. The Lesson of God's Word 4:12-13

1. When God Speaks

a. when we think of God speaking –

- (A) as in those expressions "... for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 40:5, etc.) – the first thing that comes to mind is the Bible; or as the Bible calls itself, the Scriptures: God's written word
 - (B) for the Bible is God's inspired record of His self-revelation to man
 - (C) it IS the word of God, because its Author is the Holy Spirit of God: "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1:21)
- b. but the term, the "word of God", and its variants as used in Scripture, have many different emphases, different aspects, different facets
- (A) e.g., "The Lord said to ...", or "The word of the Lord came to ..." state that what follows is the direct, spoken words of God to a man: be those words in the form of prophecy or command
 - (B) at other times, "the word of God" refers to the word of the gospel; the word of life, that the word that gives life to the believer
 - (C) then, as in the passage we had on the overhead at the beginning of the service – "So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) – it refers to God's word of command
- c. and we could give other emphases, but Hebrews 4:12 here says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." and in this verse there are two primary aspects:
- (A) the first is that it is describing God's word of promise
 - (B) the second is that it describes God's word of judgement

2. The Word of Promise (verse 12a)

- a. "For the word of God is living and active ..."
- b. the preceding verses in Hebrews have been talking particularly about God's promise of rest – rest to Israel, rest to God's people
- c. now, the readers might conclude that with the failure of Israel to enter Canaan; with the failure of the Jews to remain in the land of Canaan
 - (A) that the promise no longer has any effect or validity

- (B) but not so; for this promise is not just any promise
- (C) no, this promise was spoken by God; hence it is the word of God
- d. and as the word of God it has certain innate qualities
- e. first of all it is a 'living' word – it has the living God as its source
 - (A) it does not consist of some dead words written on a piece of paper
 - (B) there have been many such words on treaties, agreements and covenants which are dead because their writers are dead or as good as dead in terms of their intentions
 - (C) but God's promises are alive because He is alive
- f. second, it is a 'powerful' or 'active' word
 - (A) the words of man are not inherently active or powerful
 - (B) even the edicts of a powerful government, its legislation can be totally reversed by the next government
 - (C) but God's word of promise is not so
 - (D) the Greek describing God's word as >energh/v – energetic; the promise of God bears with it the energy – the power in action of God – that make His promise effective
- g. we can, therefore, depend upon these two facts when it comes to the word of God – we can stand assuredly upon the promises of God

3. The Word of Judgement (verses 12b-13)

- a. judgement must attend the application of God's word of promise; has the condition for that promise been met
 - (A) we may, perhaps, fool other people that we lived up to it
 - (B) or people may misjudge and condemn us
 - (C) but God's word of judgement is neither fooled nor in error
- b. "For the word of God is ... sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."
 - (A) God's word of judgement does not deal with surface issues; it is not concerned with mere externals

- (B) like a sword – sharper than the sharpest such sword – it can cut through all those externals to the very heart of the matter
- (C) man’s laws and conditions by their very nature can only deal with the externals, and at the very best, only guess at motives
- (D) and God’s word of judgement will stand as the measuring stick when the allotment of God’s promise of rest takes place
 - (1) Jesus said, “If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.” (John 12:47-48)
 - (2) so He said, “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; ...’” (Matthew 7:22-23)
- (E) which brings us to why God’s judgement is so penetrating, going to the very centre of our awareness and being, our soul and spirit
 - (1) resting not upon mere words, or showy deeds
 - (2) but based on our own thoughts and intentions
- c. the application of God’s word of judgement is effected by the Creator Himself – who knows us as we really are, not what we pretend to be
- d. therefore let us be assured of God’s word of promise, but take warning from God’s word of judgement – do not trifle with either

E. Conclusion

1. God’s Purpose

- a. for which He created this cosmos
- b. and this earth as a habitation for mankind
 - (A) mankind, created by God, as spiritual beings, made in His own Image, creatures with whom He would enjoy a personal relationship, a communion and fellowship together
 - (B) God having created this mankind, satisfied, He then partook of His Sabbath rest from all the

creative works which He had done

- (C) a rest that is called heaven; into which His intent and purpose is for all those of mankind who receive His salvation will join Him
- c. there to receive a fulfilment and soul satisfaction that for the time being is beyond all human understanding and comprehension

2. God's Promises and Warnings

a. God has spoken to mankind

- (A) giving both promises and warnings
- (B) promises of blessing
- (C) warnings of judgement
- (D) and the condition under which either blessing or judgement apply

b. the authoritative record of those promises, of those warnings is to be only found in the written word of God, the Bible or Scriptures

- (A) promises, as for example, in 1 John 2:25, "This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life."
- (B) or warnings as in John 16:8, "And He (that is, the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment"
- (C) and of the condition, as in John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
- (D) that condition is whether a person is trusting – believing – in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation ... or not

c. now the onus is on you, as it was upon the people of Israel in the OT when Moses said, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live ..." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

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ASV American Standard Version of 1901
AV Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Barnes – *Notes on the New Testament, et alia*, by Rev Albert Barnes, Gall & Inglis, Edinburgh
BM – *Biblical Museum*, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC – *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan
Hebrews, by Leon Morris
EGT – *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton
Hebrews, by Marcus Dods
Gill – *Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament*, by John Gill, D.D.
Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.
NICNT – *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*
The Epistle to the Hebrew, by F. F. Bruce
RWP – *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*, by Dr. A. T. Robertson
TYN – *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
Hebrews, by Donald Guthrie