

Dear Group Leaders and Hosts,

My apologies for being a day late. I made a tactical mistake of writing a summary for the congregation rather than a discussion guide for the group leaders. I will get it in the right order next week. You will see that the first paragraph is meant for a different audience although not also relevant for you. I have added discussion thoughts on the end...

This is a synopsis of last week's sermon from Hebrews 4:1-13 entitled "The Rest of the Story." The purpose of this review is to: (1) help you remember last week's message and (2) be better able to connect last week's message to not only today's message from Hebrews 4:14-16 but also to the "rest stops" we have already taken. The theme of rest is deep and rich and worthy of an extended meditation hopefully leading to a deeper application.

This year the Boston Red Sox started very well, winning a franchise record 108 games before heading into the playoffs. But if they had not finished well by winning the World Series, the great beginning would have been a bad, not good, memory. Thankfully they did not disappoint us! Likewise, people put a lot of time and money into weddings but when it comes to marriage, how one finishes is more important than how one starts. And a marriage is much more important than a sporting event.

Hebrews 4 is about the even greater importance of finishing well as disciples of Jesus Christ. We need to give attention not only to receiving Christ but also to obeying him all our lives (cf. John 14:23-24). The chapter begins with this admonition, "*Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it*" (v. 1). Later the writer adds this, "*Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience*" (v. 11).

The example of finishing poorly because of disobedience cited by the author is that of the generation of Israelites who were delivered out of slavery in Egypt. While the good news was preached to them (v. 2), it was of no value because they didn't have faith to obey. Instead they grumbled and complained against God repeatedly when tested during their wilderness journey, culminating in their refusal to enter the land because they did not believe that God, who had judged the gods of Egypt in the 10 plagues and defeated the Egyptian army by splitting the Red Sea, could defeat the inhabitants of the land. So, they never entered God's rest because they could never enter the rest of trusting God

The good news that was preached to them is the same as the good news preached to us; the good news of the Kingdom of God. God was speaking and working through Moses but instead of believing and obeying they rebelled and missed out on entering God's rest. The rest God offers is the rest of his kingship, of being his people under his rule and care. That is the very message we saw in Psalm 95. The "rest" of the story of the Bible is the rest that comes when we submit to the kingship of God and walk in obedience to his commands. This understanding of rest is what connects all the "rest stops" we have visited in Genesis 1-2, Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, Psalm 95, and the book of Hebrews.

The Sabbath-rest that remains till "today" (vv. 6-11) is the rest accomplished through Jesus Christ. I showed a video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ecPeSRID3Y>) that connected the "finished" of Genesis 2:2 with the "finished" Jesus spoke on the cross (John 19:30). Unlike the Joshua of the Exodus generation who did not lead the Israelites into the rest of heart confidence in God, this Joshua (Jesus' Hebrew name) can bring us into the true Sabbath-rest resulting from hearts that receive, rather than reject, God's authority and rule. But we must continue in that rest for the rest of the story, never allowing our hearts to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (3:13). We finish well by continuing in the confidence we had at first. I would briefly note that verse 10 which speaks of resting from one's works does not mean one rests from obeying/pleasing God. Verses 11-13 would make no sense if that was the point (cf. Romans 6). Rather most commentators take this as a reference to one's death; one's final rest at the end.

I never got to verses 12 and 13 but you might want to add them to your discussion. They follow verse 11 and highlight the importance of entering the rest of obedience leading to this week's message on Jesus our high priest in Hebrews 4:14-16.

I would focus the discussion on the importance of finishing well. Does your group know people who didn't finish well, who dropped out of following Jesus? What caused those people to drift away (2:1)? We finish well by relying on Jesus today. Like last week, I would again talk about spiritual practices that help us "fix our thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest" (3:1). I would also think about the things in our lives that seek to drive a wedge between us and Jesus (go back to 3:12-14).

I would also follow up "we too, have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did". I explained the gospel as being the rule and reign of God which is God-centric and, I believe, helpful in shaping us as disciples of Jesus Christ. His life was God-centric to the max and the good news is that we too can live now in the Kingdom of God through the forgiveness of sins and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Think about the exodus generation together. Who obeyed? Who disobeyed and why? You could also reference 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 which would be a helpful addition to the discussion.

May the Lord be with you. My apologies again to those groups which already met before I got this out.

Blessings,
P Dan