Sunday, 11 October 2026

Sunday Class **Notes**

Hold Fast

Hebrews 3:1–4:13 · English Standard Version

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians under persecution, people who were weighing an immediate relief against a longer obedience. The pressure was real enough that a return to Judaism looked like safety. The letter's central claim is that a relationship with Jesus, even when it costs, is better than anything the Mosaic covenant can offer. Alongside that claim stands a warning: a deliberate turning from Jesus is the loss of salvation. This is not the picture of a believer who stumbles, dies before a specific confession, and is lost. It is the picture of someone who turns and walks away.

The temptation to leave Jesus for the synagogue is not the temptation most of us face. The difficulty of following Jesus in the environment we actually inhabit is. Whatever makes faithfulness hard is what Hebrews addresses. The comparison of Jesus with the law is foreign to our anxiety, and yet that comparison still displays the greatness of Jesus, which is what a wavering commitment needs.

The book falls into two movements. Jesus is better than the revelators and leaders of the Old Testament, and better than the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices. The practical consequence follows: life with Jesus demands faith under hardship, and obedience. The portion before us is the comparison with Moses and Joshua, and the exhortation that comes with it. Hold fast.

Hebrews is not written in the way we usually read. The writer will say a thing, then say what looks like an unrelated thing, and the connection has to be found. Second Corinthians and Hebrews are the letters that teach this discipline most sharply. Effective study is study in context, which means slowing down and asking what joins this sentence to that one. The digging is hard. It is also how the letter yields what it has.

Consider Jesus

The argument of the previous chapter still governs. Moses received the law through angels. Jesus is greater than angels. His revelation is therefore greater than the revelation Moses brought. The objection the writer anticipates is obvious from Psalm 8: if humans are a little lower than the angels, and Jesus became human, how can he be greater than angels? He became human in order to learn sympathy and in order to die. There was no other way to become like us, and that is what he did.

Chapter 3 opens on that foundation. The first word is therefore. The readers are holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling. The calling is heavenly in both directions. It came from heaven,

from the God who lives there, and it leads to heaven. Salvation began with God's initiative, not theirs. What they are told to do is consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of their confession.

> **Hebrews 3:1**
> *"Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession."*

An apostle is one who is sent. Jesus was sent from heaven. He is also high priest, the one who goes back. The calling came from heaven to heaven. Jesus came from heaven and returned to heaven. The confession they have made is the confession they are tempted to abandon. The answer to that temptation is not a set of secondary assurances. It is Jesus. If faithfulness is the aim, Jesus is the means.

More Glory Than Moses

The comparison that follows is not an attack on Moses. Verse 2 says that Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed him, as Moses also was faithful. Moses was not a failure in his calling. He led Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, toward the land, and under the law. He was glorious, and the glory was not only metaphorical. His face shone. He was called by God, and he was great. The point is not that Moses was small. The point is that Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory.

The first reason is the difference between a house and the one who builds it. The builder receives more honor than the house. When people admire something well made, the credit belongs to the maker, not to the thing made. The thing did nothing. Jesus is the builder of the house. Verse 4 presses the implication: every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. If Jesus is the builder, and the builder of all things is God, then Jesus is God, and of course he has more glory than Moses. Moses was a piece of furniture in the house, and a remarkable one, a great handmade credenza, carved and fitted with gold. He was still furniture. Jesus built the house.

> **Hebrews 3:3**
> *"For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself."*

The second reason is the difference between a servant and a son. Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant. Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. The prepositions matter. Moses was a servant in the house. Jesus is a son over the house. In a wealthy household, the son receives more glory than the maid. Moses was the servant. Jesus is the son.

> **Hebrews 3:5**
> *"Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later."*

The third reason is easy to miss, and it sits at the end of verse 5. Moses was faithful as a servant for a testimony of the things that would be spoken later. Moses was not the fulfillment. His work pointed beyond itself. His calling was not, finally, to draw attention to Moses. It was to testify to what, and to whom, would come. Moses was the foreshadowing. Jesus is the reality.

> **Hebrews 3:6**
> *"But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope."*

Verse 6 then turns. Christ is faithful as a son over his house, and we are that house, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm to the end. The if is the hinge. We are God's house on the condition that we hold fast. The comparison with Moses has become an exhortation to the church.

Israel's Unfaithfulness

The therefore of verse 7 carries the argument into a warning drawn from Israel. Verses 7 through 11 recount a people who hardened their hearts, provoked God, and tested him. He was angry with them. The sentence he swore is the sentence the rest of the passage will not release: they shall not enter my rest. The rest, in Israel's story, is Canaan. They rebelled. They were unfaithful. He did not let them in.

> **Hebrews 3:11**
> *"As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"*

Israel is not set here as a people to be scorned. The easier reading is to congratulate ourselves. We would not have complained. We would not have worried about water. We worry about food while we are eating it, anxious tonight about what we already have in hand, while they had nothing and were afraid. There is a great deal to learn from them, and the writer's purpose is to teach us about ourselves. People do not change. What happened to them can happen to us.

That is the force of verses 12 through 15. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. They fell away and did not enter. We are no better and no different. Falling away, and not entering, remains possible.

Hebrews 3:12
"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."

False Confidence

Verses 16 through 19 strip away a confidence that is not confidence. Who provoked him when they had heard? Not a pagan nation. His own people, the ones who came out of Egypt under Moses. With whom was he angry for forty years? Those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness. God saved a people, and when they turned against him he slew them. To whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? They were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The application is direct. You are God's people. If you turn against him, he will not spare you. Were they destroyed because they were unbelieving, and was that unbelief demonstrated by disobedience? Yes. Are you saved? Yes. Will you be destroyed if you are unfaithful and disobedient? Yes. That is the point, and it is the end of the chapter.

The false confidence he is dismantling is familiar. I am a member of the church. I have been baptized. I do not use an instrument. I take the Lord's Supper every Sunday. None of that is the holding fast the passage requires. First Corinthians 10 makes the same move with the same generation. Privilege is not perseverance.

The Rest That Remains

Chapter 4 continues the theme, and it is difficult. The difficulty is a reason to stay with it rather than to summarize it away. The opening command is to fear, so that none seem to have come short of God's rest. A reader who knows Joshua will object at once. Did Joshua not fulfill the promise and give them rest? Why speak of entering a rest that has already been given?

Hebrews 4:1
"Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it."

The rest Hebrews is pressing is not, first, a nap, and not, first, heaven. It is release from the works of a self-made salvation and from the fear of judgment. The readers were considering a return to Judaism, and under a law of works a person must save himself, which he cannot do, and so he fears judgment. There is no rest in having to earn salvation. Rest is also fellowship with God in his own

rest, the satisfaction and joy of the seventh day, when God looked at what he had made, called it good, and rested. The Christian joins God in that rest. Perfectly, it will be heaven. To collapse the word into heaven too quickly is to miss what the letter is doing.

The proof that the rest can be missed is Israel. Good news came to them, as it has come to us. The word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. The wording is difficult, and there is a textual uncertainty in it, but the point is not uncertain. They did not have faith. They heard, they did not believe, and they did not receive the rest. Unbelief prevents the acquisition of God's rest. Those who have believed enter it. The entrance is not a guarantee against a later disbelief and disobedience. The generation that was heading toward the land died short of it. The nation, in time, entered. Joshua did not finish the work. Enemies were left in the land. What God had commanded was not fully done.

Hebrews 4:2
"For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

The writer then answers the objection about Joshua in a way we would not choose, and it is a biblical way. The rest was never full. People who were supposed to be in it were not in it, and undefeated enemies remained. Because it is not yet full, it is still available. The evidence is the distance between Joshua and David. Joshua's work belongs to the fifteenth century before Christ. Five centuries later, David still speaks of entering God's rest. If David can say enter, then Joshua did not finish it, and the rest is still open.

Hebrews 4:8
"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on."

The rest is not guaranteed by having entered. Verse 11 says to be diligent to enter, so that no one falls by the same sort of disobedience. A person may have heard the word, believed it, and be in God's rest now. Staying is not assured, because disbelief remains possible.

Hebrews 4:11
"Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

No One Slips Past

One question remains, and it is an odd one until the passage is allowed to answer it. Can a person who does not believe slip past God's judgment by looking like a believer? Present every Sunday, fond of the singing, respectable, careful with words, and inwardly an unbeliever. The answer is no, and the reason is the God with whom we have to do.

Verses 12 and 13 are almost always taken as verses about Bible study, or preaching, or a devotion read before sleep. They are judgment verses. The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. No creature is hidden. All things are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The point is that God will not be fooled by the outside. Genuineness is required because concealment is impossible.

Hebrews 4:12
"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Concluding Thoughts

The warning, then, is to fear coming short, so that the word is united by faith in those who hear, so that the good news is not disobeyed, so that the confession is held fast. Entrance into the rest is guaranteed to the one who trusts Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, it says. If a believer rejects that trust, becomes an unbeliever, and intentionally abandons Jesus, the benefits of a life in Christ and the reward after this earthly existence is forfeited. That is what Hebrews says.

Acts 16:31
"And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"

The hope of this teaching is that the greatness of Jesus, set beside Moses and beside Joshua, strengthens the hold. The house is his. The rest is still open. Holding fast is the condition of remaining in both.