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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Hebrews 4:1-13 Fall 2026

"Rest for the Resolute" TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in the Book of Hebrews, and we're looking at chapter 4 this week—and I'm going to cover a lot of that chapter. Chapter 4, beginning with verse 1 through verse 13.

4 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. **2** For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. **3** For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

"As I swore in My wrath,

They shall not enter My rest,"

although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. **4** For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh *day*: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; **5** and again in this *passage*, "They shall not enter My rest." **6** Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, **7** He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

"Today if you hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts."

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8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day
after that. **9** So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. **10** For the one who
has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following*
the same example of disobedience. **12** 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.
13 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.

Hebrews 4: 1-13

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

LORD, we do pray for Your blessing upon us…this is a great text of Scripture, (and every text of Scripture is), but we need to hear the things that are presented here and I pray that the Spirit of God would open our hearts to it and that You would minister to us in a variety of ways—with encouragement or with conviction, LORD, use this text of Scripture to build us up in the faith.

There is no growth in the spiritual life, in the Christian life, apart from the study of Your Word. And we stress that so often, but it needs to be stressed…this is what nourishes our souls. And so we pray that Your Spirit would minister to apply it to us because we in and of ourselves, (though we have ears to hear), cannot if the Spirit does not teach us; and so we pray for His ministry.

LORD, there are so many issues we have with our health or with our finance…. You know all our needs that we have, and You're sufficient for all of it. And so we pray that You would strengthen us spiritually, and we pray that You would bless us materially and physically.—Bless our health; and my we be grateful for all You give us. Give us

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grateful hearts, LORD. We have much to be thankful for…most of all for Your Son and His death for us. And also, for the Word that we will consider this morning…Your inerrant Word that is so necessary for our spiritual life, maturity, and wisdom.

So bless us now Father, we pray,

In Christ's name.

Amen.

(Message) Probably the most quoted line from Augustine is at the beginning of his *Confessions*. It is a book that is really, his prayers, all the way through—from beginning to end He's communicating with God. And his initial prayer in that book is, "You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."

Rest for the weary is wonderful. And since the earnest believer in Jesus Christ is often war-weary, or world-weary, there is no better hope offered to him or her than rest. It evokes images of relaxing after a long day of labor, of satisfaction and joy for a job well done. Rest is relief from work and worry; it is 'shelter from a storm'. And Augustine knew that a person has eternal rest only through faith in Jesus Christ; He is our shelter, our safe harbor.

The author of the Book of Hebrews knew that before Augustine did, and so did the people to whom he wrote his letter, a small congregation of Jewish Christians living in Rome. But they were having doubts.

They were not enjoying rest; they were suffering persecution. They were anxious about their lives, and they were thinking maybe they could find 'shelter from the storm' in the synagogue. So they were thinking of going back to Judaism.

But there is no going back. That was demonstrated from Israel's history in chapter 3, when the people of the Exodus had a failure of faith. They experienced difficulties in the desert, rebelled, and they wanted to return to Egypt. The result was that they never entered the Promised Land.

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Unbelief was their undoing. And that's the lesson of Psalm 95, *(vs7-8),* that is quoted in chapter 3; 'Don't repeat the failure of the fathers.' "Today," David said, "…if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts…". And that's the lesson of Hebrews 4: 'Don't harden your hearts to the Word of God as Israel did'.

Our situations are similar. According to verse 2, we both had good news preached to us. [Literally, it is, "The Gospel has been preached to us, just as to them."] The Gospel message was different, but both had the promise of *rest*. Israel's good news was the promise of rest in Canaan; ours is the promise of rest in Christ, and heaven to come.

But the danger now is the same as it was then: *unbelief*. Israel had "good news", but the author says the people "did not profit" from it, "…because it was not united by faith in those who heard". *(vs2)*. It's not enough to just '*hear'*…[It's important to hear, and when I say *hear*, I mean not only to *hear* the words ,but to <u>understand</u> what we hear.]…but also, a person must *believe*; <u>that's</u> the lesson.

Promises must be received with faith. And faith that is real, is *persistent* faith—it continues to the end.

So the chapter begins with a stern warning, "Let us fear." The New International Version translates that, "Let us be careful"…but *fear* is the strict translation and its meaning is not 'terror', but '*awe'*…'*reverence'*, (although I think there is a measure of 'terror' in it in view of the context). It's the first word in the verse, so the chapter begins with that—which makes this emphatic.

There is an emphasis right at the beginning because there was a lack of fear, evidently, in the church. The saints were not taking the promises of God, God's Word, as seriously as they should have. But as the writer will state, God's Word is very serious. It is unique, it is vital, it is, 'alive and powerful, just like a sharp sword that cuts deeply'. *(vs12)*.

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This is an essential lesson for all of us. Spiritual failure begins when God's Word, when His revelation, is neglected. And Israel is a demonstration of that by its failure to trust the LORD…to *believe* His promises.

So, considering the catastrophe of its *unbelief* the writer exhorts the saints: "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it." *(vs1)*.

And then to encourage them to continue on in faith, “firm to the end”, *(Heb 3:6),* he explains the kind of *rest* that we have.

It's, ‘a better rest’ than what was promised to Israel. Our *rest* is not temporal, it is timeless. It is ‘God's rest’, and it is referred to in Genesis chapter 2, verse 2, when, “God completed His work”, (of creation) and, “rested on the seventh day”, (and that verse’s message is quoted in verse 4 of our text).

What is interesting about that day is what isn't said. The first six days of creation all conclude, "There was evening and there was morning…"; so, it's a complete day. It's a complete work that's finished.

However, that refrain does not occur on the seventh day—and what's suggested is: ‘The rest of the seventh day…’, (the Sabbath), ‘…has not ended; God is still resting.’

That tells us a lot about ‘the rest’ that is promised to the believer. It's not inactivity; it's completion. When God finished the work of creation, He didn't become idle. He didn't withdraw from the world like *Deism* teaches: [‘That God made the world like a watch. He wound it up, and it began to run on principles of its own…and He left the work to itself.’]

No! He continues in His work, and He continues to be active in His work of providence, even today—and every day. In verse 3 of chapter 1, Christ is described as ‘upholding all things’. He is constantly doing that. The idea of that statement is, ‘carrying the ages along’. He is *presently* creating time and history. In John chapter 5, verse 17, Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

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God is omnipresent, God is omnipotent, He is all-knowing, He is all-present, He is everywhere, and He is always exercising His power. So, the idea of *rest* in Genesis chapter 2, verse 2 is, 'a working rest'…it is, 'an active rest'.

But it has the idea of 'satisfaction' —the satisfaction and joy of work *completed* and *well done*. That's the *'rest'* that is promised, and that we will have through faith. We have rest <u>now</u> through faith in Christ.

We *rest* from our works; the work is done. He declared that from the cross; "It is finished". *(Jhn 19:30)*. There is nothing for us to <u>do</u> but *rest* in what He has done and what we receive through faith alone.

But the fullness of that rest, the completion of salvation is still future. It's what the author refers to when he says in verses 1, and verse 6, that the promise of 'entering it' still remains. So we have it now…we rest in Christ, but the ultimate fulfillment is still future.

So, we must wait for it—and that's not easy to do. Waiting is an essential part of a mature Christian life—but there is very little that's more difficult than waiting. People lose patience and are quick to 'sell out' for the temporal, for 'the momentary,' for short-lived rest—and neglect the eternal, (which is permanent and forever!)

The world promises so much **now**, happiness **now**—but it's a lie; it is never ultimately satisfying. It never lasts; it is only a temporal experience and a passing pleasure.

We see that later in chapter 11 of this book. There, the writer speaks of faith, and he gives the faith of a number of the ancient saints: One is Moses, who lived his first 40 years as a prince in Pharaoh's house and chose at the end of that time to be a Hebrew instead of an Egyptian. He possessed all of the riches of Egypt and had access to all of the pleasures that you can imagine, all that was offered in that age…everything the world had to offer was his to enjoy. But the writer said, "By faith Moses…refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin…" *(Heb 11:24-25)*

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Well, they must have thought Moses was a fool to give up all that he gave up. But Moses knew God's promises; he feared the LORD and took seriously God's revelation. It's the world that is the fool. The men of this age have their good things now…and then nothing. We have ours in the future…and forever, 'treasures that never fade away'; and Moses understood that.

So we're not to look for our *rest* in this life. We are pilgrims in this world. The church today is like Israel in the wilderness; we are outside 'the Promised Land'. But even when Israel reached Canaan under the leadership of Joshua in that next generation, (which was 'the faithful generation'), the nation didn't enter into the real, ultimate rest; and that's what the author says in verse 8. Joshua did not give them rest, for if he had, David would not have written Psalm 95, (400 years later), about 'a future rest', and then, urged people to believe the promise and, 'not harden their hearts'.

Earthly Canaan was a physical rest from the journey through the wilderness, and it was a great blessing. They entered "the Beautiful Land", as Daniel called it. *(e.g. Dan 11:41)*. But it was only a foretaste of the glory that is to come.

Our hope is not in this world, it's in the world to come; what is described in chapter 11, *(vs16)*, as "a better country…a heavenly one". So the author writes in verse 9, "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." We're not to be impatient, to give up hope…we are to continue on until we enter it; persevere to the end.

Then, as he explains in verse 10*b*, we will rest from all our labors, "…as God did from His." Then, the struggles of this life and our service here for God will be complete—and we will rejoice.

We rejoice now; we have rest now; that's the rest that Augustine wrote of in his prayer. We rest from the work that Christ alone has done…we rest because of that. We rest because we have His righteousness now…but that's not the final rest.

We enter that when this mortal life ends—and ultimately our rest comes with the resurrection, with the Kingdome to come, and with "a new heaven and new earth".

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(Rev 21:10). That's what the author of Hebrews is speaking of here in verse 10; His rest, God's rest, our future rest, is the age to come.

In this present age, we have forgiveness, we have peace with God. We're not striving to obtain salvation…it's the gift we have at the moment of faith. We are His children, we are members of His family, and we have fellowship with Him as we live by faith. That is our experience presently.

We have eternal life now and experience God's life, but it is only a sample of the life to come. We have the Spirit of God within us, our hearts are sealed with the Spirit, but He is the *earnest* of what is to come—which is beyond our imagination. That is the hope that we have of *eternal rest and glory!*

In 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 6, Paul speaks of his approaching death and he says, "…the time of my departure has come."; which is a very hopeful way of describing death. The word *departure* was often used of a ship weighing anchor and sailing to another port, (that is, 'death' for the believer). It's not the end; it is a journey to a safe harbor. That's our destination. We can't see it from here; 'We live by faith not by sight.'

We're like the keeper of a lighthouse who looks out on the vast Atlantic Ocean, and every day he sees ships disappear over the horizon. He knows they have a destination, and that beyond the sea there are continents. (There's Africa, there's Europe, and the British Isles… and he can't see them from where he is.) But he can see the ships cross over the horizon and nevertheless know, they're headed there.

So too, we can't see heaven, we can't see that heavenly country…but we know it's there, beyond the horizon of this world. And we know that because God's Word has revealed it to us, and we know that those who cross the horizon…arrive safely where Paul said, 'a crown of righteousness was laid up for him'. *(2Tim 4:8)*. Now, that's the hope of the believer in Jesus Christ. That's the hope we have…this life isn't all there is.

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So, considering all of this, and the hope we have and the dangers we face, the author again urges the Hebrews, (and us), "…to be diligent to enter that rest…", *(vs11)*, …'*relentless'* to enter that rest, '*resolute'*, '*diligent'*!

Later in the Book of Hebrews chapter 12, *(vs1b)*, we learn of "the race"…and it's a race that is long and grueling—and we are to apply ourselves to it and not to be slothful in that at all.

Well, that's what a portrait of Henry Martyn seemed to tell Charles Simeon, (Simeon was a very influential Anglican minister in England in the late 18th and early 19th century), and he had on his wall one of those portraits you know, where you can look at it…and wherever you are in the room, it seems to be looking at you. I have one of those in my library.

My youngest daughter is an artist, and she painted my older daughter, (I think they were in junior high), but it's a very good likeness of her. And I'll sit there at my desk, and I'll look up and she's looking at me. I'll move to the other side of the room as I'm leaving, and she's looking at me. It's a strange phenomenon…I wonder, 'What she's thinking?' Well, that's the kind of portrait that Charles Simeon referred to, that he had in his house.

Mr. Martyn, I should say, was a brilliant scholar, a linguist who used up his life at a young age in missionary service for Christ in India and in Persia, translating the New Testament into their languages. And Mr. Simeon knew him well, (in fact was very responsible because of a sermon he preached and that Henry Martyn heard, very responsible for him going to the mission field where, as I said, he 'used up his life' at an early age in the service of the Lord.) Well, Mr. Simeon said of this portrait of his friend, "No one looks at me as he does; he never takes his eyes off me, and seems always to be saying, 'Be serious. Be in earnest. Don't trifle. Don't trifle.' "

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How easy it is *to trifle*…and how dangerous. Israel failed to enter its rest with all of the blessings it had…and that stands as, 'a God-ordained warning to us not to trifle!' Be serious in believing…and so repeatedly we're told,

"Today if you hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts,
As when they provoked Me."
Heb 3:15

That's not an idle warning. It is based on God's Word, which means it is true.

That's confirmed in verse 12, where the Scripture is described as a sword, but a sword unlike any other. It's 'alive, sharper than a razor', and pursuing us. That's the description;

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword…" *(vs12a).*

In my library at home, (I'm giving you a tour of my study), I have a sword mounted on a wall. Inscribed on the scabbard is the name *Captain H.L.P. King*, and the date *1915*. Captain King was my grandfather. His sword was part of his uniform. It's a handsome sword; the blade is embossed with initials, *U.S*., and images of a drum, spears, and flowers.

It's a beautiful sword…but it's a dress sword. The blade is blunt; it couldn't slice bread…it would have been useless in battle.

But the sword described here is not dressy, it is strictly functional—yet it is a sword suited more for a surgeon than a soldier. It cuts, (but it doesn't draw blood), it operates on the soul to expose sin—and give salvation, and conviction, and correction, and hope. There is nothing like it!

The Bible is unique of all books; it is no 'dead letter'. It has application for every person of every age, in every age, and every location, and for every occasion. It is

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"living", always relevant. But it is also alive with the power of God, the life of God—and what gives Scripture this power is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit; He is in it.

He is the real surgeon. He guides the Word to perform the operation on the soul. And His surgery is always effective; it affects people, it changes them. It affects nations and history. The Reformation was all about the Word of God; translating it and teaching it. Luther was once reflecting on that and said, "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with Philip and Amsdorf…", (his very good friends), "…the Word so weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all."

It does. God's Word is unique, God's Word is alive, it comes after us and is like 'the hound of heaven' in its pursuit.

It is real power. It is nothing to play with, it is nothing to treat lightly; it is serious business. Mr. Spurgeon wrote of that in a sermon on this passage and, "How it can transform people even when they are reading it with indifference, or reading it with ridicule."

He illustrated that with a story about a man named Mr. Thorpe, who was a member of a society called, *The Hell-Fire Club.* That was a group of cynics who mocked the faith: They didn't believe in hell, they didn't believe in heaven…they didn't believe in anything. They were of this upper crust of society, and they lived very wanton lives.

But they would mock the faith, and they would also mock in particular the great evangelist of that day, George Whitefield. At one of their meetings, Mr. Thorpe got up and delivered one of Whitefield's sermons. He did it very effectively, imitating Whitefield's tone and manner, when in the middle of his exhortations he paused, sat down brokenhearted…and was converted on the spot. Mr. Spurgeon said that "Mr. Thorpe was thoroughly transformed." And he went on to have a ministry of his own in Bristol, where he led many people to Christ.

The Word of God is alive and powerful: God says in Isaiah 55:11 that, 'It will never return to Him empty'. So don't underestimate it.

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It is God's 'sword and scalpel'. It penetrates the human personality; "…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." *(12b).*

Jeremiah 17: 9 says,

"The heart is deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?"

Well, you and I can't…we can't understand our own motives. God's Word does; it shines into the dark corners of our mind, and it exposes the truth about our lives. It reveals reality—nothing else does…No clinical psychologist can analyze us as reliably. (Now that's not to say that doctors shouldn't prescribe certain medications for people with certain conditions, I don't deny that.) But the Bible does far more than any physician can do for an individual. It separates between "soul and spirit", between 'thoughts and motives', what we're thinking and why we're thinking it. It lays it all out so that nothing is hidden to us…as we read the Scriptures.

The Word, the Spirit using the Word, shows us who we are. He is like a physician and a judge; He probes our soul and says, 'You're sick here, you're weak here, you have a problem here'…but then heals the problem, fixes the problem. The life-transforming work of God occurs through the Bible as we read it and study it. Read it seriously and study it carefully. It changes us, it convicts us…and it condemns us where we need that.

And the Word heals those who receive it in faith and judges those who ignore it or reject it. And there is no escape from it. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight…", He writes in verse 13. "No creature hidden from His sight"...Think of that!
We can hide from people, and we can fool ourselves…But, we can't deceive God, He is always watching, knowing, and bringing conviction.

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The Samaritan woman in John 4, who met Jesus at the well, learned that lesson. She came to draw water, it was a daily chore, so this is what she has been doing, and does it every day. She goes there to do the same thing, and it's hard work drawing water and carrying it back to the house. She was a woman in need of rest.

Jesus engaged her in conversation; He asked her for a drink from the well…then He offered her water, "living water". *(Jhn 4:10).* Now, "living water" can mean two things: what He meant was, 'spiritual water'…or it could mean 'running water', (like the water of a stream). If the water is flowing, it is "living water". And so He offered her this, "living water".

But she could think of nothing other than the well water that she was approaching…and the idea that, 'I can have something where I don't have to go to this well.'

So she was 'all ears' when Jesus then told her that, 'she had five husbands, and the one she presently had was not her husband.' *(Jhn 4:20)*. She was shocked. She had never met Him, and as far as we know, she didn't know that His name was Jesus at this point in time…and yet He had laid out her whole life before her!

When He finally revealed Himself to her as the Messiah, she dropped her bucket, she ran back to town, and she said, "Come, see a man who told me all the things I *have* done…" *(Jhn 4:29)*.

That's what Scripture does. It's the Word of God…just as the words of Christ were to that woman. He speaks to us; the Father, the Son, the Spirit speak to us in Scripture. It is <u>His</u> Word.

When we read Scripture, it reads us and tells us all that we have done. And that experience authenticates its authority. It searches us, knows us, reveals our thoughts and motives.

We can read *about* the Bible…and we can read books that explain 'the authority of Scripture' and 'the integrity of Scripture' and all the facts that support that with the documents that we possess, and the integrity of Scripture. That's good to do.

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But nothing will fortify your faith and assure you of its truth and authority more than reading it!

Reading it carefully, reading it seriously.

It reads you…and self-authenticates itself as alive and powerful. And you will say to yourself, 'Come read a book that has told me everything that I have ever done.'

It opens us up and it lays us bare to God Almighty; "…laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." *(vs13b).* There is nothing hidden from Him; He 'strips off every disguise'. (That is the sense of the word "laid bare".) It's a graphic word; it's used of a sacrificial victim whose neck is bent back and exposed to the knife and it is, '…Him with whom we have to do." the author says. (ibid.). That's a sobering thought…it should be.

But, it is intended as well to be an encouraging truth. Our God is a great physician; He knows our 'condition', thoroughly, and can fix it and heal us. And He knew the worries and the weakness of those Hebrew Christians, He knew their 'condition', He knew them, (and He knows us as well), and why they were thinking of abandoning the church for the synagogue. He knew it all—and He understood it.

He knew how to use His Word to effectively deal with their condition, to apply correctly the warnings they needed and the encouragement that they needed—and it's the same for us. We need to read and be open to the Word of God. It exposes our condition and convicts us and corrects us…and encourages us. It convinces us that the promises of this book, the promises of God are real—that our future, our "hope" is certain, which encourages us to be diligent in the faith. The hope it gives us is great encouragement to persevere.

Later, in chapter 11, the author encourages us with examples of men and women who persevered in faith through great challenges and trials, and who remained steadfast in their hope. One of the incentives for their faith was their future.

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Abraham was 'looking for a city'. He wasn't enamored with the cities of this world, "…he was looking for a city… whose architect and builder is God." *(Heb 11:10)*.

Moses was, 'living for the reward, the future reward; he could give up the treasures of Egypt because he knew what was coming…the greatness of it.' *(Heb 11:24-26)*.

And the description of God, given here, is encouraging;
He is infinite,
He can do what He says He will do, and,
He will bring the kingdom to the earth.
He will fulfill His promises.
He is reliable,
we can trust Him,
He cannot lie, and,
He will give us rest.

Well, that's our hope. It is unseen to us now, but it is as real as the continents are on the other side of the Atlantic. God's Word is true, and our "hope" is to come.

And our "hope" is real, those promises are sure, they will not fail.

But there is a rest before that final rest, and that is the rest of salvation from sin and judgment. It is the rest of peace with God that we have now, presently, in the midst of this world. That is what Jesus spoke of in Matthew chapter 11, verses 28 and 29, when He invited all, "who are weary and heavy-laden" to come to Him and He would give them "rest.…rest for your souls." And our "hope", that is to come, is real—those promises are real.

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So, are you weary from life and weighed down with trials and troubles—and weighed down with guilt like that woman at the well? Then come to Christ. He died in our place so that all who trust in Him will have eternal life and rest.

May God help you to do that, and help all of us to rest in those great promises.

(Closing prayer) Father, we do pray that we will run the race to win the prize. And the prize will be great and help us to live a life of persevering through difficulties. We can't do that on our own strength, we can only do it in the strength of the Spirit: and we will only do it in His strength as we apply ourselves to Your inerrant Word. So LORD, stimulate us to do that—to be men and women that attend to the Scriptures, and let them examine us as they will. We thank You for Your inerrant Word—it is the greatest gift we have in this world.

We thank You for the message of it and what it reveals about You, our Triune God;

That You are a loving God,

That You have sacrificed Your Son for us,

And through Him we have life everlasting. We thank You for that.

Now LORD, we pray that;

You would bless us and keep us;

Make Your face to shine on us,

And be gracious to us;

And lift up Your countenance on us,

And give us peace…*Shalom*.

We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen.

(End of Audio)