

# Entering God's Rest

*Hebrews*

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 4:1-13

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## **Austin Bluffs Evangelical Free Church**

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Well, we continue our study this morning in the book of Hebrews so please find yourself there along with me, the book of Hebrews chapter four this morning. Hebrews chapter four. Let me read the passage for us this morning. Hebrews chapter four beginning at verse one of Hebrews four.

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. 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. 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. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST."

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, 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."

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 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 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.<sup>1</sup>

This is the Word of God.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we sit before your Word again this morning, your Word which has itself declared about itself that it is sharper than any two edged sword, that it is able to get inside of us and do heart surgery, as it were, that it is able to divide between the thoughts and intentions of our heart, that it is able to act as a judge and as a discerner revealing to us the secret thoughts of our hearts, the intentions, our wills, our motivations, all of these things become clearer when we expose ourselves to your Word. Lord, we pray that that is, indeed, the ministry that you would perform among us this morning, that you would take your Word and by your Spirit allow it to do its heart work in us. We thank you, Lord, for providing a rest for us, a true sabbath rest. In you we can find that rest. Help us to find it truly today and to prize it above all else. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Last week we saw that the writer of Hebrews was using Psalm 95 and the story of the Israelites' unbelief and their failure to enter into the Promised Land. He was using those two things—which are related, Psalm 95 and the story of the Israelites' unbelief—as a spiritual illustration for his readers illustrating that just as the Israelites had failed to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief, so we may miss our own spiritual Promised Land, heaven, because of our own unbelief.

We all know the story. We looked at it last week. I just want to remind you again, the story of the Israelites and their Exodus from Egypt. God had promised to give them the land. He had promised Abraham and he had promised Isaac and he had promised Jacob repeating those same promises that he would, indeed, give them a land, the land of Canaan. The Israelites spent 400 years in Egypt—half of those years, thereabout, in slavery—but God miraculously delivered them from the Egyptians. And, according to his promise, kept them from slavery, continued slavery in Egypt, kept them from dying by the hands of the Egyptians when they pursued, miraculously delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians and promised to deliver them into the Promised Land, the land of Israel.

And we all know the story of what happened. Time and time again they failed to believe God. They failed to take him at his promises. And as a result of their unbelief, they failed. That generation failed to enter into the Promised Land.

Well, the writer of Hebrews uses that as an illustration of how we may fail to enter into God's salvation by our own unbelief.

This morning we are going to see the author continue to expand on this theme of the importance of personal faith in Jesus Christ and, in particular, how failure to exercise this

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:1-13.

faith in Christ will result in a failure to enter into God's true rest, God's Promised Land, God's salvation.

And so as we look at this passage this morning we are going to see together five helps for entering God's rest, five helps for entering God's rest.

I am sure all of us here this morning want to enter God's rest, God's salvation. We want to go to heaven. Survey anyone on the streets and by and large they are going to say, "Yeah, I would rather go to heaven than hell."

Well, the author gives us this morning five helps in achieving that desired end of waking up on the other side of eternity in heaven. First of all he shares with us that we need to cultivate a holy fear of missing God's rest. All of us, every one of us this morning needs to cultivate a holy fear of missing God's rest.

Verses one and two. Look at what he says. "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."<sup>2</sup>

Chapter four is linked and based upon the closing verses of chapter three. You can see that "therefore." It immediately should draw your eye back to what has gone before. And what has gone before is this story of the Israelites. It is summed up in verses 16 through 19.

For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore...<sup>3</sup>

In light of Israel's unbelief, in light of their failure to enter God's rest, "Therefore, let us fear."<sup>4</sup> Let us fear. Let us fear that though the promise of rest remains some of us would fall short of entering it, that though God holds out the promise, the hope of salvation, that some of us might miss it and it might not be ours, that we might not enter into that Promised Land of God's rest that is heaven, ultimately.

The Israelites had failed to take God at his Word and trust him and therefore they failed to enter that rest that he promised. And, likewise, we can fail to enter God's rest. What is God's rest? We talked about it a little bit last week. What is God's rest? The author of Hebrews is using it here in a technical sense. It is not just simply, you know, sitting down and taking a load off. That is kind of the picture. It is much more than that. It... the rest

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<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 4:1.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 3:16—4:1.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 4:1.

that he is describing here is a technical use of that word to describe the sum of salvation. All the blessings that come to us by finding ourselves in Christ, that is the rest. It is the rest of salvation. It is the rest of knowing that your sins are forgiven. It is the rest of knowing that though once you were the enemy of God, now you are the child of God. It is the rest in knowing that your future is certain, that there is therefore now no condemnation because you are in Christ Jesus. It is the rest of knowing that you will spend an eternity with God in heaven. That is the rest that come to our souls when we come in repentance and faith and believe on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done on our behalf.

This rest is not given to all upon entry into life. It is not something we are born with. We are born outside of the rest, outside of the Promised Land, if you will. And it is our task in life to make it to the Promised Land. And there is only one who can lead us there and that is none other than Jesus Christ.

Even as Joshua was the one who led the people into the land, so Jesus Christ is the one who leads us and makes the way possible.

In a book entitled *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* based upon these verses the Puritan Richard Baxter describes the rest in these terms. "The rest is the ground of all the believer's comfort, the end of all his duty and sufferings, the life and sum of all gospel promises and Christian privileges." It is the sum of salvation. That is the rest that our writer is talking about. It is a rest that we experience in part today and that we will one day experience in full when the Lord returns and sin and sorrow is done away and rest will be experienced in full.

"Therefore," says our writer, "let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it."<sup>5</sup>

There is a place in the Christian's life for fear, fear, holy fear, not a sinful fear, but a righteous fear, a respectful and sober realization of just what is at stake in these matters relating to salvation, a respectful and sober accounting and realization that my eternal soul is in the balance here when we talk about being right with God and how to be right with God, a fear that moves us to ask the following questions. Where am I going to spend eternity? And why do I think I am going to spend eternity where I think I am going to spend eternity? What am I basing that one? What are my beliefs with regard to eternity? What do I truly believe and does my life reflect these beliefs? Are these just beliefs that I know I am supposed to believe, beliefs that have been so nurtured in me through life because I grew up in the Church, I went to Sunday school, you know, I have always sort of been around these things? Or are these beliefs that really are the very fabric of my being, they are beliefs I think about on a daily basis and they affect my decisions.

The Christian is to have a holy fear, a holy fear that understands that the heart is deceitful above all things and that it is possible that we could deceive ourselves into thinking that

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<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 4:1.

we are saved when, in fact, we are not. There will be people on judgment day who stand before God, the Lord Jesus Christ and say, “Lord, Lord, you know us, right? We did all these wonderful things in your name.”

And what is his answer going to be? “Depart from me. I never knew you.”

The fully believed that they were in the kingdom. They fully believed that the rest was theirs. And they began to defend themselves, stating their case. The verdict was unchanged. “Depart from me. I never knew you.”

A Christian should have a holy fear of missing God’s rest.

Now this doesn’t mean it is some kind of fear that is paralyzing, that absolutely grips your soul in terror. I am not talking about that kind of fear, not the kind of fear that keeps you awake at night, but a proper, holy fear that moves you to regularly examine your life.

Just as Paul told the Corinthians, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you— unless indeed you fail the test?”<sup>6</sup>

That is an imperative. Test yourself. Examine yourself lest you fail the test.

There is a very legitimate place in the Christian’s life for a holy fear of God and a fear of missing his salvation, a fear of falling short of God’s rest. The fear that I am talking about is the opposite. It is the opposite of spiritual pride and presumption that says, Of course I am a Christian. I made that decision in Sunday school a long time ago when I was 12. Of course I am a Christian. I realize I haven’t given a thought about it since then, but of course I am. I realize that I don’t have much interest in the things of God, in the Word of God. I realize my life doesn’t necessarily look like the life of a Christian, but of course I am a Christian. I was born in America, after all.”

It is the kind of fear that the author of Hebrews is commanding us to. It is the opposite of spiritual pride and presumption that assumes upon the grace of God rather than examining our lives and seeing if they, indeed measure up to the tests that God’s Word gives us.

Look at what he says in verse two. “For indeed we have had good news preached to us.”<sup>7</sup> The gospel, they had heard it. “Just as they also,” that is, those Israelites, “but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.”<sup>8</sup>

You see, those Israelites of that generation that came out of Egypt, those Israelites had heard the good news preached, the good news that God had delivered the land into their hands. But it did no good. Simply hearing the good news preached did not do them any

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 4:2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

good because it was not united with faith. They did not take what they heard and let it sink deeply into the heart and let it affect their wills. It, as it were, went in one ear and out the other. It rolled right off of their backs because it was not united in faith.

And the danger that existed for these Hebrews to whom our author is now writing is the same danger that exists for us today, that we may simply hear the good news preached, hear the gospel perhaps over and over and over again, but not unite that hearing with faith, personal trust, personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, it is not enough just to hear the gospel. You have to believe the gospel. It is not enough just to be around the gospel. It is not enough to know the gospel. We have to entrust our very souls to the gospel. And this is where holy fear comes into play when we understand that we can know truth without believing truth, that we can affirm certain facts without really clinging to them for dear life, that we can check certain doctrinal boxes and yet still not be recipients of salvation, that we can articulate the salient points of the gospel message and still miss the benefits, the eternal benefits of that message.

These Hebrews, some of them, anyway, were guilty of this. They had made profession of faith in Christ. They believed—at least outwardly—certain facts concerning Jesus Christ. They had associated themselves with the Church. They had even suffered loss for the sake of that association and yet they were in danger of falling short of God's rest.

Why? Because though they knew the message, though they heard it and could repeat it, they had not united the message with faith, personal trust in Christ. And every Christian ought to have a holy fear that though they know the message, perhaps the message doesn't own them in a saving way.

Cultivate a holy fear, one help to entering the rest.

A second help: Realize that faith in Christ is the only way of entering God's rest. Realize that faith in Christ is, in fact, the only way of entering God's rest.

The writer makes this crystal clear in verse three. "For we who have believed enter that rest."<sup>9</sup> Who is it that is allowed entrance into the rest of God? That is only those who have truly believed, who have heard the message and who have united the message in faith. Salvation has always and only been attained through individual faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me say that again. Salvation has always and only been attained by those who exercise individual faith in Jesus Christ. It has always been that way.

In the Old Testament it was a faith of looking forward to Messiah, though they didn't know the word "Jesus," that he would, indeed, be named Jesus, that he would necessarily... all the facts about him. But they were looking forward, given the knowledge that they had, of a Messiah who would come. In the Old Testament they were saved by

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4:3.

God's grace through faith. And likewise now as we look backward at Christ's coming, his death, burial and resurrection, it is only by faith that we are saved. All those who enter God's rest enter by the same means, by personal faith in Jesus Christ.

What is faith? Let's drill down in that just a little bit further. Faith is trust. It is believing, but a believing that goes beyond mere acknowledgment or mental assent. It goes beyond mere agreement with facts and it moves to the level of actual trust, entrustment.

You see, we might be able to see a ship that looks very seaworthy. You believe it to be in good condition, well built, sound, no leaks. It looks like it could carry you across the ocean. But it doesn't become faith until you walk the gangplank, get on board and cast off. That is when believing the ship is sound becomes faith that the ship is sound.

The issue is trust. The only way we enter God's rest, the only way we come to have salvation and the forgiveness for our sins that we need is by trusting Jesus Christ to be our Savior, not merely believing facts about him, but, indeed, ceasing to strive, to earn your own way, to somehow earn merit with God; stopping all of that and saying, "I can't do it on my own. I completely entrust my soul to the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross."

Have I entrusted my soul to the care of Jesus Christ? Am I today trusting in him and his sacrifice, his finished work to be the sufficient sacrifice for me? Or do I merely believe certain facts about him?

We also see in these verses a bit more about the nature of God's rest that he has provided and promised for us. He quotes again from Psalm 95:11 in verse three, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,"<sup>10</sup> my rest.

You see, the rest that we may enter by faith is, in fact, God's rest. It is my rest he says, God's rest. The rest that we enter by faith is that rest which God rested on the seventh day of creation and he quotes from Genesis chapter two verse four, "GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY."<sup>11</sup>

God's rest in the days of creation was not the rest of laziness or the rest of fatigue. It is not that God was tired, you know, just exhausted. But it was the rest of completion. You see, the work was finished, the work was done. Nothing more needed to be created. Nothing more needed to be spoken into existence. It was finished, completed and so, having nothing more to do, God rested. And the rest we enter is, indeed, the rest of God.

When we enter God's rest, we enter into that rest of completion, that rest of nothing more needing to be done, that rest of being made right with God and enjoying the blessings of that relationships as Pastor Rob prayed earlier that we can pray, "Abba, Father." Daddy. Privileges or fellowship are ours. It is this rest of completion, this rest that God is calling

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 4:4.

us to and he is calling it to us today. And we may be at rest with him if we but trust in Jesus Christ to save us. And the only way to enter that rest, that rest of completion, that rest of ease, is by faith in Jesus Christ.

A third help toward entering into God's rest: Cultivating a holy fear, realizing that faith is the only way to enter God's rest and, thirdly, recognize that the faith that enters God's rest is inseparably linked to obedience. The faith that truly is able to enter God's rest is a faith that is inseparably linked to obedience.

Look at verse six. "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..."<sup>12</sup>

Notice he says that they failed to enter because of their disobedience. Now that should stand out to us because earlier he said that they failed to enter because of unbelief. Look at the end of chapter three verse 19. "So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."<sup>13</sup> Not disobedience, unbelief.

Look at chapter four and verse two. "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."<sup>14</sup> They did not have faith. That is why they did not enter the rest.

So which is it? Is it a failure of faith or a failure of obedience that kept them from entering into the Promised Land? And the answer is, "It is both, because they go hand in hand." Faith and obedience go hand in hand. They always have. They always will.

Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin. The Israelites lacked faith. Indeed, they lacked faith. They did not trust God. They did not entrust themselves to God. They said, "God, this is a horrible idea. There's giants in the land. We are going to get killed. Let's go back to Egypt."

They were not willing to entrust their lives to God. And so they missed out on the promise. They lacked faith. They didn't believe that God would deliver the land into their hands and therefore they did not obey God's command to take the land. They didn't believe so they didn't obey. Their unbelief resulted in their disobedience. And so the author of Hebrews can rightly say they didn't enter the land because of unbelief and they didn't enter the land because of disobedience. Faith and obedience are always linked.

That is the whole argument of James chapter two, is it not? Faith without works is dead. Faith without obedience is dead. Anyone who says they are a Christian, but who doesn't manifest a concern for being obedient to what Christ commands, their faith is suspect. Anyone who professes to be a Christian, but who doesn't manifest a concern for Christ's commands should have doubts about their own salvation.

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<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 4:6.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 3:19.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 4:2.



Now I am not talking about a life of perfection here. Let me be clear about that. As long as we live in these fleshly bodies we are going to struggle to be obedient, no question about it. But is there a concern for obedience? Is there grief when we are disobedient? Is there repentance that is forthcoming upon that disobedience? Is there a renewed desire to next time be obedient under the same set of circumstances? Does that characterize your life? If you are a person who has faith in Jesus Christ, the Scripture says it will characterize your life. You will be concerned about obedience. Why? Because faith is inextricably linked to obedience.

Jesus said in Luke chapter six and verse 46:

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words...<sup>15</sup>

Now listen to this.

Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.<sup>16</sup>

True, saving faith always shows itself, manifests the fruit of obedience. Obedience isn't what saves us, but it does show that we are, indeed, saved. It is a fruit of our faith.

A fourth help—these last two come quickly, so just hang in there with me. Understand that God's rest is available today. It is available today. Again, we see the urgency of the matter in verses seven and eight, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE."<sup>17</sup>

"He again fixes a certain day, 'Today,'"<sup>18</sup>

This is the opportunity. This is your moment. You have been exhorted to fear that you might fall short of God's rest. You have heard this morning that the only way to enter God's rest is through faith in Jesus Christ, faith that is coupled with obedience, a desire to live for your Lord and to serve him. The opportunity to enter God's rest is before us today. Don't sin the sin of presumption believing that, well, I have always believed these things so I must be a Christian. Don't assume, further, that you are able to make that decision later in life. Later in life may never come. Your death may be around the corner. I hope not. None of us know how many days we have left on this earth. The Lord Jesus

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<sup>15</sup> Luke 6:46-47.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 6:47-49

<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 4:7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

may return at any moment. He could come today. You may not have another opportunity. This is it. Today is the opportunity. Today grace is being extended. Today the offer of entering God's rest is there for you if you will receive it. Reach out your hand and take it and grab it by faith believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is today that the opportunity exists.

Don't put it off. Understand that God's rest is available today.

And, finally, this morning, fifthly, be diligent to enter that rest. Be diligent to enter that rest.

There is a rest for God's people and he exhorts us to be diligent to enter that rest.

Verse 11. "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience."<sup>19</sup>

What example of disobedience? The Israelites, their lack of faith which led to a lack of obedience which led to them falling and dying in the wilderness, never entering into God's rest. He says, "Be diligent. Give yourself entirely to the task. Let it consume you. Treat it with the attention it deserves because your eternal soul is at stake. This is not some passing issue. This is not some peripheral thing in your life. This is the most crucial decision in your life you will ever make because it will impact you for all eternity."

Be diligent in it. Give yourself entirely to it. Let it consume you. It is not that salvation can be earned or deserved or worked for, but that it should be so desired that we pursue it with the greatest interest and passion and desire.

It is like the parable Jesus shared in Matthew 13. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."<sup>20</sup> Or, further:

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.<sup>21</sup>

He was willing to part with everything else in life so that he might have this one prized treasure. And what is that treasure? It is the kingdom of heaven. It is the rest that God offers us. It is Jesus Christ himself.

Don't all into the same ditch that the Israelites fell into. They heard the message, but they didn't believe. They heard the command over and over again, but they weren't obedient. Be diligent to enter the Lord's rest. Seek the Lord while he may be found.

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<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 4:11.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 13:44.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 13:45-46.

And the word of God, verse 12, is a two edged sword. It judges us. God uses his Word to expose our hearts, to show us things about ourselves that we never knew before. And I suspect that he has shown some of us things that we have never considered before this morning. The Word of God is judging your heart today. What is the verdict it is rendering? Have you entered God's rest? Is it yours now? Have you truly trusted in Christ and not merely believed things about Jesus?

If not, the words of verse 13 should share you greatly.

“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.”<sup>22</sup>

God is our judge. Your sins will be judged, every single one of them. You will either pay the penalty for those sins yourself by spending an eternity in hell experiencing the active wrath of God or you will allow Jesus Christ to bear the penalty those sins deserve and you will entrust your soul to him and his perfect sacrifice on the cross and his mighty resurrection. And you, by faith, will enter God's rest.

Let's pray together.

*Lord, these are challenging words to us, words of hope because they tell us about your rest that you have provided for us in Jesus Christ, words of conviction for they challenge us to live in reverent fear, fear that we might believe, but not truly exercise faith and obedience in Jesus. Lord, may your Word do its work of judging the thoughts and intentions of our heart. And may your Spirit speak so loudly in our hearts right now, testifying, witnessing, bearing witness to us whether or not we are one of your children. And, Lord, may any one here to who isn't sure about that or even comes to the conclusion that they are sure they are not, may they go quickly to the throne of grace and cry out to you for mercy and trust, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and enter your rest this morning? We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 4:13.