

# Taking True Rest

*The Book of Hebrews*

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 4:1-10  
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Well, we resume this evening in our considerations in this wonderful epistle of the Hebrews, to this group of believers. Well, we image perhaps them being in Jerusalem and here we've discovered that the writer alternates between warning and encouragement. They are in danger of committing apostasy, of gradually declining from the truth, of weakening in their affection for the Lord, and beginning to return to things to do with the old covenant and the priesthood.

So they're warned, don't go by that way, that is the way of disobedience, that's the way as in verse 1 of chapter 4, we read of them falling short, coming short of the promised rest that they are to enter. And it is a reminder, then, of the need for faith. The things that these people, these believers that the writer is writing to, just as the people who first had the benefits of the Promised Land, also the benefit of Psalm 95 telling them, "Today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts," but didn't mix faith with it, didn't hear it in such a way as it would profit them, that they discounted it, unbelief surfaced and found objections to it, and began to unpick it and feel that it didn't work for them, that it wasn't a true word. So the warning is given, don't come short. Mix what you hear with faith. Lay ahold of it. Believe it. That was the danger both for all the people in past eras, and was now the danger for the people that the writer was here addressing. So we've had the warnings of chapter 3 and verses 7 through to 19, the danger there when Israel had the opportunity to enter into the land, the promise of rest that was given to them, and refused it and turned back and would have gone back to Egypt. Moses had to intercede and God judged the people and said to them that those in that generation apart from Joshua and Caleb would have to perish in the wilderness because they did not believe the promise of God, they did not heed what was said to them, and ultimately it is to refuse now to hear Christ's voice. He's the one that speaks. His is the voice that addresses us now and if we won't hear him, then there's no other place to go, there's no other voice to listen to, nobody else can bring us any comfort, nobody else can bring us any salvation and therefore we are very much under that obligation to listen to him.

But the promise is there in this passage. Actually, it is an encouragement and it is quite technical and the way in which it is argued and follows his case through, may bring us there into a state of puzzlement at times as to precisely what he may be speaking about, what rest is this that he is drawing together, a theme seemingly from creation on through

the Promised Land and the refusal there of the people to enter there, and then taking it to Psalm 95 and a further address by David, and then today a promise that today is the day, the accepted time of the Lord. How does that all work? How does it all fit together?

And the promise is there held out to us as it was to these first recipients of this letter, that there is a rest promised and it's there in verse 1, "a promise remains," there it is, "of entering His rest." It's there again in verse 6, "Since therefore it remains that some must enter in," and even if most apart from Joshua and Caleb didn't enter in because of disobedience, others did, and we can see that the promise is held out to us still. And again in verse 9, "There therefore remains a rest for the people of God." It remains, the promise remains, the offer, the invitation is still open, and though others have failed properly to access it or to appreciate it and use it, the offer remains and that was the offer that is held out to the people here who are perhaps entering into in a period of disobedience to woo them away from that, to offer to them a promise as well as to offer to us today that same promise.

So there are encouragements here even though, as I've said, the way in which the argument develops requires of us some thought. You do realize, don't you, the Christian faith requires thought, it requires careful application. It's not for the lazy. It's not for the careless. It asks something, actually, of our minds, stretches our minds, requires of us to think in ways perhaps that we're not accustomed to, and so we find a little bit of that held out before us here. Very often Christians want to avoid thinking, they want to avoid having to think too deeply about too many things but Scripture won't allow us that. We have to think deeply and we have to apply truth carefully and considerately and with deliberation to the situations that we find. So there is a promise here, a promise of rest, and so the title of the sermon is taking proper rest. Taking proper rest. Well, some of us there physically might take that one to heart and perhaps somewhere within the truth of spiritual rest there's a hope too of some relief physically.

Well, our first heading: God's rest. God's rest. He has rested and we find that the promise is given there and we see it in verse 8, the quotation preceding it of the rest that Joshua was to give the people, leading them into the Promised Land, the opportunity that the people would have there of blessing, and of peace, and of grace, and of fellowship with God. And there is the rest spoken of in Psalm 95 which was originally the rest that was given to Joshua's generation in which they refused, but is also speaking to us today, there is Scripture working today. So in the rest of the Old Testament time, Psalm 95 stood there and then into New Testament times, new covenant times, that "Today" still stands there.

And indeed, it is a gospel promise. There we see it in verse 2, that this promise that was there through Joshua and given to the people of what they could enjoy in the Promised Land is the gospel promise, "the gospel was preached to us as well as to them," for they also were promised that God would be gracious to sinners, that he would pardon their sins, blot out their transgressions, and that this would be something they could enjoy, and the Promised Land was like a token of that, that there they would settle and there if they were obedient and followed what were then regulations and the requirements of the old covenant, their fellowship with God would be very deep and would be very rich.

It is a rest, a rest that was promised there to the people. A rest, in fact, which is God's rest, that is part of what God's rest means. They're not entering into their own rest but into God's rest, what God himself has enjoyed, and this takes us all the way back to creation. That's how the argument goes, isn't it, that having begun with Psalm 95 and the "Today" that was given then and the opportunity of Joshua's generation going into the Promised Land, actually this all ties up with the beginning of time, creation. So we're thinking a little bit about it this morning, and particularly within creation which we read a moment ago in Genesis of that distinct day called there the seventh day but for us with the resurrection of Christ, well, we would call it now the first day, our Sunday, the Lord's Day. And this day which God hallowed and blessed and called holy is God's rest. There is something in what that means which is also there in what was meant by the promise offered to Joshua's generation, which was then the promise that was held out later in Psalm 95 to whatever generation including our own that that Psalm would be read by, that the promise remains. And the promise is somehow written into what was there right at the beginning of time when God himself, having created the heavens and the earth in six days, then rested from his work.

And that hasn't changed. That remains still the same and in force. So we say God himself did that work in six days, not that he expended energy or perspired over it or had to stop as we might have to stop and consult some instructions as to how to proceed further with it. Well, no, he knew exactly what he was going to do, he knew from eternity what he was going to do, in eternity what he would do in time. And so he did, so he spoke and these things came into being. But then at the end of that week, having made all these things and that he declared finally when man was on the earth and he had made man and we read those things in Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea," and so forth.

Then he speaks of what happened at the end of that week. Genesis 2, reading from verse 1, "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished." Like that they were finished. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." It's not rest inasmuch as physically he needed recharging, needed to just put down the work of creation to recover from the exertion because there was no exertion, all he did was speak, that was all that was needed and he had the power to make those things to happen exactly so. But he set apart this day, this seventh day in the week, to be something distinctive. There he had been, he had been creating and in the seventh day it was an opportunity there as he would express it and express it to us, for him to rest from that work and we read in Hebrews how this having done although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. These works, this rest that is promised in Psalm 95, well, in a sense, the works have already been finished. This rest is already there and it didn't just happen when Joshua's generation had an opportunity to go in the Promised Land or that people might pick up and read Psalm 95 and see that today that if we won't harden our hearts and hear his voice, then we shall enter his rest, but actually the promise is there right at the beginning of time. It's there in creation and what

God was teaching us by way of his rest when he rested from all his works, the works that were finished from the foundation of the world.

Well, we know that the Lord is working to this day and the Lord Jesus Christ had an eye to working and that in the context actually of something he'd done on the Sabbath day. And we know that what happens in the world, the laws that God has written into the world, that he's upholding everything by the word of his power, by his Son. And so in that way, well, he's working all the time, if you will, but the world itself, creation, everything that was going to then be upheld and continue, that was finished, no new species suddenly appearing, no kind of different moon up there or some fresh stars that just suddenly appeared, or we wake up next day and there's a whole new species of creatures grazing up on the recreation ground, or somewhere there on the grass and you say, "I've never seen those before. That just happened." Well, no, it didn't just happen, did it, because the species and the kinds and all the things that are here, the framework of nature was done then and God hasn't in that way added to those things. There they remain.

And he finished his work and he rested, and we can see that that commandment remains the same and some dispute this but when you start trying to break up the 10 Commandments and say that some apply and some don't, we're in very dangerous ground and it's there in Exodus 20:8 and following, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." This is our precious Sabbath day. This is this day that the Lord has made that we rejoice and are glad in it, and a day in which the principle is established to us to leave those works that we're about behind as far as we can. We know that's not always possible, people are obligated to work on the Lord's Day in public services and other work situations which require them, on occasion at least to be there on duty, and so we understand that that has to be so. But here is the principle, that this is the day not to have work concerns, not at least inasmuch as we're about that work. We may need to think about work or we may need to be thinking about how we can apply spiritual truth to that work, as though the other six days of the week don't exist because it's a Sunday and we don't then think about the other six days. No, we often do our best thinking about the other six days of the week on the Sabbath day, how we can do our work better, how we can apply biblical principles more exactly to the people that we are, in the things that we do.

So it is a set apart day and ideally we leave behind work. We try and lay down ground rules if we can and our secular age makes those ground rules more and more difficult to actually apply and hold to, the requirements and the obligations that come upon the Lord's people. So we can appreciate the difficulties that can emerge and do emerge. We know people that are in fellowship for whom those things intrude but we aim to set down those ground rules for ourselves, the things we'll do, and the things that we won't do, the

things that we will be busy in on the Lord's Day and those things that if they're there we think, "I'll leave that for another day. I'll deal with that another day. That can wait another moment, another opportunity." Not that on the Sabbath Day we don't do any thinking or suggesting to us actually this is the day to do the best thinking. This is the day to work quite hard in our thinking on how we understand the Lord's Day, how we understand Scripture, how we apply it, how we reason through it and gain greater grasp of all the principles.

So we look to God for help, our best to actually follow and enter into his rest and what his rest means and how we are to think of that and have a day which is a rich and a fulfilling day, rather one that might be restricted with rules or hemmed in and about with fear. That often is what's happened through history is the day has been so regulated with fear we actually miss the moment of what this day can actually offer to us. Not a day to make money. Not a day to be occupied in other things. Not a day either to go to the extremes that the Pharisees went and the things that they regulated and over-prescribed, and the Lord had to rescue the Sabbath from man, that the Sabbath there was made for man, not man for the Sabbath as though there was some Sabbath requirement that man then had to fit in irrespective with whatever duties, obligations he had, family requirements, commitments, what the state of spiritual health and understanding was. And so our Lord made the Sabbath to be a day to benefit us, not a day to be imposed upon us and to leave us powerless, wretched and even rebellious. Sadly that has been the case in terms sometimes of over-prescription.

So we don't go to wild extremes and we saw, didn't we, the other month when we were looking how the synagogue ruler had no answer when the Lord was saying, "If your donkey falls down the well, do you just leave it there because it's the Sabbath day?" And they could not answer him because the case was unanswerable. Well, it is, of course, peculiar that the worst Sabbath breaker must be me, that here preaching, ministering and these things we find that I can tell you is work, and at the end of it I'm quite tired. And we read, don't we, in Matthew 12 and verses 5 to 8, that this was a situation that the Lord actually spoke about and how he had himself there when his disciples were challenged because they were eating grain in the field because they were hungry, they were passing through, and this occasioned complaint from the Pharisees, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." But he said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him but only for the priests." Ah, they thought about that. Well, they hadn't. "Or have you not read in the law," and here it is very pertinent, "that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless. Yet I say to you that in this place there's one greater than the temple." Well, provision is made, then, for preachers and ministers of the gospel, who always manage to find a day in the rest of the week to rest up. That is a little bit in short supply these days, as it often has been. But we can see that there the Lord introduces to us a capacity to reflect upon the Sabbath certainly more deeply than the Pharisees who thought that they understood what work looked like, thought they understood what you could and what you couldn't do then forced it with to their mind an iron logic, an iron rigor, and the Lord released us

somewhat from some of those burdens that they had imposed, including what preachers might be able to do.

So God rested on that seventh day and what did that mean? Well, it was invitation. It was an invitation, firstly, to Adam and Eve, that God was going to take satisfaction in his work, he was going to survey the works of his hands and he was inviting Adam and Eve to come and fellowship with him in surveying it as well, that they too were to stop from their work and all that they were doing tending the ground and looking after it, tilling the ground as we read, and they were to fellowship with God and enjoy communion with him in a way that they would be able to do to some extent in the other days of the week. It wasn't excluding rest for them in any of that, but because they had those other responsibilities they couldn't do it in the same way that they now could do it on the Lord's Day, on the Sabbath day when God himself had shown that he would rest from his work, that that work was now finished, he was satisfied in it and declared it good, and that he was inviting all to come and to reflect upon it with him, to be in fellowship with God.

That is the rest, that to think of what that means and, of course, now we've gone beyond creation and just as when the people came out of Egypt, they can now reflect upon redemption and that, for us, is where the Lord's Day particularly comes. Or we can think about creation and God's work in creation, we have done and we've read a little bit this evening, but it's for us to survey, isn't it, the wondrous cross, it's for us to reflect upon God's works in redemption and to fellowship with him in that, to be able to have the space and the time to have two worship services where we come, come to that any other day in the week and we wouldn't expect our employers or whoever to give us the right to do it.

We're jealous to preserve the integrity of this. We come in worship and we reflect upon those things and we fellowship with God in our sung praises and the prayers, Communion Table, and as we hear read to us Scripture and preached. And we fellowship with God through the day. We reflect upon him. We think upon him in a serious way, not a trivial way. We're wanting actually to be deepened in our faith. It's a day for repentance. It's a day for reflection upon our soul. It's a day to ask ourselves the people that we are and the people that we should be, and how we remedy that, and how we rectify those things and begin to move closer towards what our Lord Jesus Christ had shown to us in his life. It's a day that's made for us, actually, because it's a day in which we can fellowship with God more deeply, with more time that we can spend in the Bible, reading good books, praying to God, being in worship services such as this.

So we have something to remember. That is it, we have something to remember, indeed, someone to remember. We have works of redemption to remember. The Communion Table helps us to remember that here on this day so much for us to dwell upon, closer to the Lord to see him better as we shall think in a little bit more detail in a moment, to be consumed by fear, not to waste it, not to let it be frittered away from us. How many Sabbath days when we've lost the moment or things cropped up or crises, emergencies, just duties to attend to, well, we felt a little sad at the end of it that we didn't enjoy what the day was actually promising to us, and that we'd not been able to remember it as we

might have wished. And of course, we take care how we apply it. Non-Christian, husbands, wives, situations like that require carefulness and delicacy, unbelieving children again requires care in the application of it lest they become discouraged and have a yoke that is too heavy for them to bear. The law cannot create Christians. That cannot be produced from within a particular set of observances. They need to see for themselves the glory of God and then they'll see his day in that way.

So we take our proper rest. We would want to be able to have high thoughts of God to challenge ourselves, to stretch ourselves in our understanding and to come ever closer to him in real fellowship. So my second heading is this: the best rest to take. Well, it is ultimately rest in Christ that is spoken of here. That is the rest that is promised which really was promised there in types and shadows in the Old Testament and which when we see what the Lord did on that first Lord's Day, if we can call it that, that first Sabbath day when he rested from his works and declared them finished. Well, there it is that on the cross that work of obtaining salvation was finished. God's work is finished there as though always patterned within what the Sabbath day, the work of creation finished, there would be another rest where we enjoy fellowship with God, when the work of redemption will also have been finished. And we have a Christ that we can survey, Christ who's represented to us at the Communion Table. It doesn't tell us that the work still remains to be done, it's a promise and it remains open and we can come and enjoy fellowship with God.

The Sabbath day, then, is like a pledge and a token of God's promise of fellowship, fellowship ultimately that we would enjoy in and through his Son. Moses, well, it was a Promised Land and there would have been blessings had they been obedient that they could have enjoyed in that, but beyond it the today which ultimately was the promise of rest, was the today which there in creation was already being prefigured God would rest from his works. Well, God rested from his works of salvation and redemption in his Son who declared on the cross that, "It is finished."

So we come in fellowship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and we can experience that rest which he has brought us, and have that fellowship with him and with the Holy Spirit and with our heavenly Father, and then also with each other, that God's rest ultimately is that rest in Christ and the fellowship that the promise holds out to us there. So there are no works in verse 10. We cease from our works in that way, as though we were able to provide some entry of our own to be able to have fellowship with God. We put that aside. We've ceased in that. We now rely solely upon him and our fellowship is rich because we've ceased from those works ourselves. We have better thoughts now what holiness and righteousness actually constitute, and we're delivered from all the burden which there in the old covenant, the ceremonies, the burden of fear that remained with that, and that's been lifted and our Sabbath, therefore, can be very pleasant and very good.

"Do not refuse Him," is what the writer is saying. Do not refuse this ultimate of Sabbaths, this rest which begins now here on earth but, of course, then points us towards heaven itself, the ultimate rest when we enter in finally and fully free from all our sin. And what

a promise that that is, but the promise is for today that we have fellowship with our God here on earth. It is finished and no finishing touches from us needed, no extra voluntary contribution as though we're having to top up our pension by additional voluntary contributions or something. Not needed. Indeed, quite and not permitted. This is this day that is promised that Joshua couldn't fully deliver on, nothing quite in the old covenant could live up to the expectation which was there right in creation, fellowship with God which we can have on this day particularly because the truth is that that rest actually travels with us throughout the week, and we can have fellowship with him, we can draw upon all of his resources and find that blessed rest that is ultimately in Christ. Everything in the end hinges on him. Every aspect of holiness, all the commandments, what they mean, how to apply them, they all hinge on him and we see our Sabbath, then, the light of his grace and mercy, and see the day that he has given to us as a day of rich opportunity, that he invites us and bids us come and find him. Well, it may not be that with all the interferences that come and other things imposed upon us, we don't always enjoy the rest as we might but the promise is always there and the promise ultimately is the promise of heaven where all of those distractions and all of those miserable intrusions are gone and we are free to enjoy that perpetual Sabbath in fellowship with God, busy indeed about our work there and all the things which in heaven we will have to do. Taking our proper rest begins now, begins here, it's on this day, and maybe when we rest our heads upon the pillow at the end of it, we can think that we learned something, something went deeper within our soul, we saw something clearer about the Lord Jesus Christ, some burden was lifted, some yoke was taken away from us, and our appreciation of him was just deepened a little further. Well, that will be a Sabbath very well spent.

Well, let's sing our final hymn in this part of our service as we come to have Communion together and it's #37, "Come, let us with our Lord arise."