



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

The Promised Rest of God

Hebrews 4:1-10

March 29, 2009

¹Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For 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. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, 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. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’

⁵And again in this passage he said,

‘They shall not enter my rest.’

⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted,

‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’

⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

I. The Promise [Land/Rest] Still Stands

II. We Must Believe/Fear God

III. Our Rest is God’s Rest

IV. Our Rest is Eternal

- ❖ Eliezer Wiesel is a world-renowned U.S. novelist, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and Zionist activist. He has authored over forty books, the most famous of which is *Night*. In this riveting memoir, Wiesel recounts his experiences during the Holocaust of World War II.
- ❖ Most certainly the most profound of Wiesel’s experience as a Holocaust prisoner occurred during his confinement at the notorious Auschwitz death camp. Yet, what makes Wiesel’s experience so unique, is that, unlike most Holocaust survivors, he did not witness victims dying in gas chambers, rather, he saw individuals literally burned alive.
- ❖ In one of these gruesome accounts, Wiesel writes of an experience he had when he was 14 years old:

“Not far from us, flames were leaping up from a ditch, gigantic flames. They were burning something there. A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load – little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it – saw it with my own eyes... those children in the flames.

Weisel then states, “Is it surprising that I could not sleep after that? Sleep had fled from my eyes.”

- ❖ In other words, so terrified and fearful was the teenage Weisel that he could not sleep...he could not rest.

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- ❖ Another Holocaust survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, once commented about how he was haunted by his past after the Holocaust.

“In the first years after my liberation I could not sleep at all. My thoughts were always returning to those people I had lost. I had made no new friendships: my only friends were previous camp prisoners. The whole past was alive before my eyes, filled with the dead. For me the war was not over, because I told myself: they are all under the earth, but the ones who put them there are still living untouched, in every part of the world.”

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- ❖ In one way or another, we have all experienced this. Likely, it is not the result of such trauma as the Holocaust, but it is real nonetheless.
- ❖ It is the experience of the pains, difficulties, and even tragedies of life gripping us so tightly that we cannot rest.
- ❖ We become paralyzed with stress, fear, and anxiety.
- ❖ Possibly, it is because of the loss of a job, the bad economy, or a relationship that has gone south. It may be because past trauma. Yet, the effects are the same: we can never truly rest...the worry, stress, and fear never seem to go away.
- ❖ Yet, this is the focus of the author of Hebrews in this first part of Chapter 4: **true REST**.

- ❖ Yet, like every biblical truth, this rest is to be found in only one source: the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The Promise [Land/Rest] Still Stands

- ❑ **Verse 1a** states, “Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands...”
- ❑ The author of Hebrews begins this chapter with *Therefore*.
- ❑ The reason for this is that he ends the previous chapter stating, in Hebrews 3:19, “So we see that they [the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness] were unable to enter because of unbelief.”
- ❑ However, not only is God gracious, in that the *promise* still stands; but, this gives us a deeper understanding of the *nature* of Canaan – **the Promised Land: it was never intended to be the ultimate rest for God’s people**. It merely pointed to our true rest...in Christ.
- ❑ So, whereas as Canaan, the *shadow* of our perfect Rest, was called the Promised **Land**; we await our true Promised Land...our Promised **Rest** which is to be found in Christ, and in Christ alone.
- ❑ This is most certainly why Christ Himself said in Matthew 11:28-29, “²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
- ❑ This is also why Peter commands all Christians, in 1 Peter 5:7 to “[cast] all your anxieties upon Him, for He cares for you.”

II. We Must Believe/Fear God

- ❑ Then, **Verses 1b-3a** state, “...*let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For the 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. For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,*
‘As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest...’”
- ❑ Then, the author of Hebrews states, “...**let us fear** lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it [our promised rest].”
 - The Greek literally states, “**Let us be afraid...**”
 - Yet, this begs the question, “Afraid of *what*?” Contextually, the author appears to be saying, “**Let us be afraid of unbelief.**” For it was because of their unbelief that the Israelites did not enter into the Promised Land.

- Yet, the ultimate *fear* that that Scriptures command of us is the **fear of the LORD**.

Psalm 112:1 states, “Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!”

- And consider that, just as the *Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*, so

The Fear of the LORD is the beginning of REST.

- When I was a child that my father occasionally traveled for work and he was also in the Army Reserves. So, he would occasionally travel out of town for several days at a time, leaving my sister and I home with my mother. And I remember well the fear I would have at night without him in our home. Yet, I also vividly remember that each time he would return, I would sleep well that night, knowing that my father would protect us from any harm.
- How much more it is with God. When we know Him, we fear Him, for we get a glimpse of His awesome power. It is then that we know that He sovereignly superintends every circumstance, ever event. Consequently, even now we can rest, for God is in control, infinitely more than the most loving earthly father.

To fear God is to know Him, His power, and His sovereignty. If we truly fear God, we will not fear any man or the circumstances of this world, for we believe what He says about Himself, have complete confidence in His promises and ability to care for us in any situation. It is only then that we will truly be able to rest.

- **Luke 12:4-5** states, “⁴I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. ⁵But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!
- Consequently, the reason we cannot rest, and we stress and work in the manner we do is because of a lack of faith – it is sin.
 - However, in our culture and even in the Church, we hold workaholicism in highest esteem.
 - But it is the workaholic who is the picture of unbelief. For he is the one who works as though Creation hangs in the balance on what he does.
 - He is the one who so often does not trust that God is in control.
 - Now, this certainly does not mean that work is in some way bad; for we are to work with all of our heart. However, to we work the way we do because we are fearful of the unknown? And, when we work the way we do, do we neglect the

things that God has commanded us to care for...simply because we have no time to do anything else but work?

- Yet, as William L. Lane writes, “The concept of rest in the context of the promise to the Exodus generation had the connotation of entrance into Canaan (the Promised Land), where Israel would experience relief from turmoil and security from their enemies.”
- Richard Phillips states, “Jesus offers our souls the same benefits offered to Israel in the Promised Land: bountiful provision and complete security.”
- The words of **Joshua 21:44** echo this truth: “⁴⁴ And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands.
- And **Joshua 23:1**: “¹A long time afterward, *when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies*, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years,”
 - Yet, this *rest* could not have been fulfilled in Joshua, as the enemies of Israel were not all defeated ultimately and finally.
 - Yet, when we enter our rest, we will be *able* to rest, as all of our enemies – including such *enemies* as **worry** will have been defeated completely.

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- Yet, not only does Rest imply freedom from our enemies, but it also implies **perfect PROVISION**.
- Consider the verbiage regarding the Promised Land that Moses uses in **Deuteronomy 11:9-12**: “A land flowing with milk and honey...A land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the LORD your God cares for. The eyes of the LORD your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.”
- **Philippians 4:19**: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”
- Is this not the essence of rest: a state where every need is immediately provided for! This is exactly what God will ultimately do for us in our eternal rest (although there is most certainly an element of fulfillment even today!)

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- The author of Hebrews then states, in **Verse 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.”
 - This is a tremendous passage, as it speaks of the “good news”, the Gospel, which **came to us just as to them** [the Israelites in the wilderness.”

- Yet, the reason why the Israelites did not enter into the Promised Land was because “they were not united by faith with those who listened.”
- This echoes Hebrews 3:13, “But exhort one another every day...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”
- In other words, the Israelites in the wilderness did not find their unity in Yahweh, rather, each did what was right in his own eyes.
- Yet, this should serve as a warning to us today: hold one another accountable in the love of and faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Simon Kistemaker writes, “We ought to take careful note of members who may be drifting from the truth in doctrine or conduct and then pray with them and for them. We are constantly looking for spiritual stragglers.”

III. Our Rest is God’s Rest

- **Verses 3b-7**, then, state, *“although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.’ And again in this passage he said, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,⁷ again he appoints a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’*
- In **Verses 3-4**, the Hebrews author directly references the Genesis Creation account.
 - The author speaks of “his works” being “finished from the foundation of the world.”
 - He then draws a direct parallel between the *rest* in Genesis 2:2 and the *my rest* of Psalm 95. The point here is this:

On the seventh day of Creation, God *began* to rest, and has never ceased.

- Recall that after every day, Moses writes, “There was evening and there was morning, the first day (Genesis 1:5)...the second day...the third day...the sixth day.”
 - Yet, **nowhere** does God say “There was evening and there was morning, the seventh day.”

- The theological point, here, is powerful: **The Sabbath day rest of the LORD never ends...never ceases.**

Richard Phillips comments, “The picture [of God’s rest after Creation] is rather that after having made and ordered and subdued the creation according to his desired plan, his control was so absolute, his sovereignty so unquestioned, that God enthroned himself without effective opposition. His reign is one of rest – that is, of absolute supremacy and unassailable sovereignty – so much so that he exerts all his rule from the position of rest...So when we think of God’s Sabbath rest, we should immediately think of his utter, uncontested sovereign rule.”

- Consequently, when God offers us rest, that rest is nothing short of the very rest that He Himself enjoys.
- Notice as well, that Biblical “Rest” is **not inactivity**; rather, it is, as J. Hering puts it, “not...merely the notion of repose, but also...of peace, joy and concord.”
- God began His rest on the sixth day of creation, and that rest continues to this day. Consequently, the “rest” that God enjoys could not mean that He has ceased working [as the Deists assert], as we would then cease to exist, for our existence is wholly dependent upon Him.
- Also, consider the result of the Fall with respect to work/rest: “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the true of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life...By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...”
 - That is, since the Fall, our work has been burdensome, like a heavy yoke.
 - Yet, Christ, through His work has lifted that yoke, that burden.
- The author of Hebrews, then states, in **Verse 6**, “Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again He appoints a certain day, ‘Today’...”
 - Again, our salvation, our rest, is received by grace through faith and obedience in the Person and work of Jesus Christ...NOT by works.
 - Thus, if we are to enter that rest, it is only through faith. And when we do, we share in the rest of Almighty God.

□ Remember, the essence of salvation is **knowing God**; however, the immediate blessing of salvation (knowing God) is the security, peace, and comfort of resting in the sovereign rule and protection of Almighty God.

- Consider as well, Jesus Christ, who after completing His work of redemption (the *New Creation*), ascended to the right hand of the Father where He is enthroned as the uncontested, sovereign ruler of all Creation.

IV. Our Rest is Eternal

- **Verses 8-10** state, “*For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*”
- It is here, now that the author of Hebrews underscores, once again, one of the main themes of the Book of Hebrews: the superiority of Jesus Christ!
 - We have already seen that Jesus Christ is superior to angels and to Moses.
 - Yet, here, we see that Jesus Christ is superior to Joshua.
- F.F. Bruce states, “We must, of course, use the personal name ‘Joshua’ here instead of ‘Jesus’ which appears in the Amplified Version and King James Version... Yet it must be recognized that the reader of the Greek Bible had (and still has) an advantage over the reader of the English Bible because to him ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ are not two names but one; he could distinguish between our Lord and his most illustrious namesake of Old Testament days, and at the same time appreciate some of the implications of the fact that they *are* namesakes.”
- That is, the Old Testament saint and conqueror pointed to Jesus Christ – the ultimate Conqueror and Savior.
 - In fact, Joshua’s inability to lead Israel into a perfect and permanent *rest* for Israel points to the need for an ultimate place of rest.
 - Therefore, **only Jesus [whose name is the same root as *Joshua*] leads His people into the perfect, final, eternal rest.**
- Also, regarding Canaan, John Calvin wrote, “This is not the final rest to which the faithful aspire, and which is our common possession with the faithful of that age. It is certain that they looked higher than that earthly land; indeed the land of Canaan was only thought of as of value for the reason that it was the type and the symbol of our spiritual inheritance.”
- In **Verse 9**, the author of Hebrews states that “there remains a *Sabbath rest*” **not for ethnic Israel**, but for *the people of God*.
- Furthermore, the author re-emphasizes the fact that this Sabbath rest is nothing less than **God’s rest**.
- And since this is God’s rest, we know that it is **perfect, eternal, and unchanging**.

And this is the promise of heaven: our faith will be might sight. We will see our Lord face-to-face. Our faith will be perfect, and our trust in Him will be absolute. Then, we will finally and completely realize that our salvation and life is not in our own works, but in God. Therefore, we will stop striving to earn the favor of God, and we will rest in His presence for eternity.

- How many times do we say to ourselves, “I’ll rest when I finish x.” Yet, x never seems to come. Living in this fallen world is like living on a hamster wheel. We work and we work and we work, yet we never get to a point at which we can truly rest (and if we do, it is so short-lived that it means little in the long run).
- Such is the foolishness of seeking eternal rest through work. For, it can only be obtained by faith.

□ James Montgomery Boice conveys a story of missionary John G. Paton:

Paton was a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides islands. Paton set about the work of translating the Bible into the native language, which until then had no written form. Before long he encountered the problem that the language had no word for faith, which, given the Bible’s message, was some problem indeed. But one day Paton observed a hunting expedition. As the hunters came back from their exertions, he watched as they threw themselves into chairs and cried out, ‘My, it is good to stretch yourself out here and rest.’ Paton jumped to his feet and wrote the words down; they provided his translation for the word ‘faith’ in the native Bible. By faith, the weary sinner stretches out to rest on Jesus Christ, upheld by his gospel. We might substitute Paton’s translation into various verses from the Bible: ‘Stretch yourself out on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:31). ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever stretches out on him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16).”

□ Consider the words of 4 Ezra 8:52, a Jewish work written likely in the late-first century. Although it not Scripture, the words are quite appropriate:

“It is for you, that paradise is opened, the tree of life is planted, the age to come is prepared, plenty is provided, a city is built, rest is appointed, goodness is established and wisdom perfected beforehand.”

- How many of us, as the pressures and stresses of life weigh us down, simply think to ourselves, “I am just *tired*.”
- As Donald Guthrie writes, “[Since Creation/Fall] ‘Rest’ is a quality which has alluded man’s quest.”
- Yet, may we be comforted by the **hope** of eternal rest in the presence of Almighty God. For “the promise of entering his rest still stands” and that promise is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ alone!

- And, finally in **Revelation 14:13**: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors,...’”

- And this is, indeed, what it *truly* means for us to Rest in Peace...only in the peace of Jesus Christ.