

The Superiority of Christ's Rest Part 2

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 4:1-11

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

I want to pick up where we left off this morning. I again want to deal with the superiority of Christ's rest. As we study Hebrews four, it is very clear that the writer is aiming his arrows at the heart of his readers, especially those who did not have a confidence in Christ and His redeeming death. Although they had professed faith in our Lord's atonement for sin, and had publicly identified with God's people through baptism, they were devoid of saving faith. He also wants to encourage those believers, who were suffering persecution, to keep running the race. Not only were they experiencing persecution for their faith, but also their faith had been rattled by some of the defections the church had experienced. It is clear that there were many who had, under the severe arm of persecution, renounced their profession of faith and returned to the bondage of Judaism. The remaining members had felt as if their hearts had been ripped from them, as it does when someone you love and trust turns away from you and from the Lord. It is hard not to take that personally. They were wondering where their confidence was. How could they be sure that they were secure in Christ? The apostle of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells them quite clearly that they could have confidence. They could have a sure, stable, steady, steadfast confidence in their Redeemer and His redemption.

Although we examined verses one through eleven already, I want you to look at verse eleven. He says,

*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.
(Hebrews 4:11)*

“Let us labor,” almost paradoxical isn’t it? To say one must labor in order to rest sounds like an oxymoron. Normally rest is thought of as a release from work, an opposite of labor. Yet this author of the Epistle to the Hebrews by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said, “Be diligent, strive, work, labor to enter in to this rest.” Beloved, as I shared with you this morning, I am confident that this rest is not talking about our future dwelling place in heaven, although it would encompass that, for our salvation is eternal. I am of a firm persuasion that he is talking about the rest we experience the moment we are placed into Christ by faith. Faith has been the underlying theme all through chapters three and four, and, as you know, the great chapter called “the Hall of Fame of Faith” is found in none other than our book called Hebrews. This is a book about faith. It is a book about a continual, confident reliance and dependence upon God. Therefore the question for us tonight is how do we enter the rest of Christ?

If you have not entered that rest, then you have not yet experienced the peace of God that literally is to invade your life. Yes, I mean invade your inner being and chase away inner anxiety about your future, that is, your eternal future. There is a peace from God that does not come by human reasoning, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Think of this----God Himself penetrates your heart. Friends, the need of America tonight is not a tax cut. The need of America tonight is not more policemen on the streets or better schools. The need of America is that God in His mercy would show up and pierce the human heart. Oh, that He would invade the heart and soul of this people!

When that divine invasion happens, the feeling of loneliness is removed, and your heart is at rest. You can rest in Christ and soundly be at peace. How do you do that? It is only by faith. Look at Hebrews chapter four and verse three,

For we which have believed do enter into rest.

Verse eleven states,

Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest.

Is it possible that the labor he is discussing here is nothing more than desperate dependence upon God? Yes, I think it is. The labor the writer is referring to is not you coming to this church tonight and walking the aisle, shaking my hand at the conclusion of this service. It is not a public professing of faith in Christ or being baptized. It is not a physical labor, but a different kind of labor. It is a work of the Holy Spirit that produces in you this abiding confidence, this resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Again, let me refer to what I said to you this morning. When Jesus died on the cross, Jesus entered into the rest of God. He said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Three days later He was resurrected, verifying and confirming He was who He claimed to be. It was His vindication by the Father proving that His death was

an acceptable payment for our sins. When Jesus uttered those great and immortal words, "It is finished," He literally meant exactly that. Holy justice was paid in full. Redemption was complete. He had finished His redeeming work. He had run His race and finished the course. That is what He meant. At that moment Christ Jesus entered into His rest.

Just as God the Father had entered into His rest on the seventh day of creation and said with satisfaction "It is very good," so Christ entered His rest from the new creation. The new creation is the making of a new work and a new humanity called the redeemed. Therefore, the author of the text under consideration is stating that by faith only in Christ's finished work can you enter into the rest of Christ. Faith in Christ is the only way to rest. We could go one step further and say faith is the rest. Faith trusts in what Christ does, and, therefore, the struggle for God's acceptance ceases the moment faith is exercised.

Perhaps it sounds like I am contradicting myself. First, I said the promised rest only comes by faith. Second, I said that faith is the rest. How could they be the same and different? How could faith bring rest and be rest at the same time?

Faith is not the easiest thing to describe because the faith that saves the soul is a supernatural act of God. It is as you have heard me call it before, "the divine explosion." Again, when the Holy Spirit penetrates your heart, the heart rests in what Christ did on the cross as a finished work on your behalf. The very act of the heart resting and no longer struggling to solve the problem of acceptance with God is the act of faith. Faith is the ability to trust or rest upon the promise of God. As a result of this assured and restful faith, rest, or perhaps a better word, peace, occurs in the life of the believer as long as he or she keeps his or her focus on Christ. To have confidence is to rest.

Let me illustrate, have you ever been in an automobile with someone who while driving talks to you constantly? And while they are talking to you, they are constantly making eye contact with you? How restful or peaceful is your journey? It is unnerving to say the least. You may be so alarmed that you suggest to the driver that he will have your full attention and need not maintain eye contact while trying to converse and drive at the same time. But if the driver keeps his eyes on the road and he shows good defensive driving techniques, you can then trust the driver. Why, you may even recline the seat back and take a nap because of your faith in him. Listen, the act of faith in Christ is exactly that, an act of resting in what Jesus has done on Calvary. You have no alarm that His work on the cross was not sufficient to forgive you of sin and to cleanse you. You are not unnerved about your place in Heaven.

"Where do I get this kind of faith in Christ?" you may ask. "Surely I can get it by praying the right kind of prayer. No doubt, I can secure it by some daring religious act. Tell me, surely there is something I can do. Tell me what it is and I will do it. I will do it, and then I can know for sure that I am saved."

A thousand times no! It cannot come from your hand. Your hand is polluted. Whatever you touch becomes tainted. It is not what you do that matters but what Christ has already done. Faith is not the result of laborious effort. Oh no, it is an act of the mercy of God. Christ has purchased your faith while on the cross. Every spiritual blessing, which faith is, comes from Him. Therefore, I say to you, look upon Jesus. Cast your longing eye upon Him who died in the stead of sinners. Gaze upon His agonies for sin. Watch Him languish under the hand of God as God presses Him until all His life is poured out.

Faith comes from God. It is a part of the salvation God has purchased through the blood of Christ. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter two and verses eight and nine that faith which is a part of salvation is part of the gift of God. Paul writes,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

God looks upon you who deserves hell, and says, "I will have clemency towards him. I will take exception with this one. I will pour upon him loving kindness; a loving kindness that he does not deserve, a favor which he could never earn, a grace that he should never merit, for I remember that he is but dust."

What might you do? I can only give you this, rest in His goodness toward you. May you breathe it in like fresh oxygen, as one who has had nothing to breathe but noxious, toxic fumes. I pray you would drink it in and deeply. Humble yourself and cry out to God. When God takes mercy, "the divine explosion" will happen within your heart. You won't be able to explain it, but you will know it nonetheless. You know because where once there was a burden, where there was once consternation over your sin and your eternal doom, there is now peace. I have talked with people who after experiencing the mercy of God weren't aware that what they had experienced was rest in Christ. They had been weeping, with a broken heart over sin, crying to God, "I need you. Save me, I can't save myself." All of the sudden they quit crying, and they look at me and say "I don't feel burdened about it anymore." The load of sin has been so lifted that some have gotten worried because they don't sense the conviction of sin anymore. The love of God is then poured out upon their heart, and they experience the joy of salvation. The divine explosion!

Although I have tried my best to describe it to you, I must admit that you can't really explain it. All you can do is experience it. When you do, you'll know. Now let me move on to the question I promised this morning that we would discuss, can our rest in Christ be disrupted?

Let me begin by saying that chapters three and four of Hebrews are not really dealing with that. The author is dealing with whether or not you are resting in Christ. However, one cannot forget that some of those who did enter Christ's rest came short of the promise of God in their lives. Go back to Hebrews chapter three, and I want you to look specifically at verse nineteen. Our hearts ought to tremble when we read this verse. Entering and conquering into Canaan was a type of resting in Christ, but one could even rest in Christ and come short of some promises of God. The writer says in Hebrews chapter three and verse nineteen,

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:19)

The question that we need to ask is what does the word “enter” mean? It refers to two things: the rest of Christ and the entering into the Promised Land which was an illustration of entering the rest of Christ. Listen, saints can come short of the promises of God and be in Christ. They have experienced the rest of Christ that comes with grace. But that does not guarantee that they receive all the promises of God. They may come short of some of the promises because they do not, for whatever reason, lay hold of them by faith. Hebrews chapter three, verse nineteen is a very scary verse to me. I don’t fear it because I think I won’t finish the race. Neither do I fear it because I am not for sure I am saved. I know whom my confidence is in. But verse nineteen scares me because of a man named Moses. Because of unbelief Moses did not enter into the Promised Land. The story is rehearsed in Numbers chapter twenty and verse twelve. I am not saying that Moses died an unbeliever, nor am I saying that when Moses died he did not go to heaven. I am quite certain that Moses died and went to heaven. I am quite certain that he was a believer and a believer in Christ, for Moses foretold of His coming. He said there would be a prophet like him to arise. Moses was a friend of God, for God spoke to him face to face. I have no doubt where Moses is tonight. In fact, we know on the Mount of Transfiguration that there were two men who appeared with Jesus. One was Elijah and the other was our dear friend Moses. Moses is secure in the arms of Christ.

But because of unbelief he fell short of one of the promises of God, and that was the promise to occupy the Promised Land. Israel and Canaan was a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob and their descendents. It was a promise that God had made to Moses. The Lord had told Moses that He had raised him up and called him to lead His people from Egypt to the Promised Land. But because of unbelief, Moses came short of that promise.

Allow me to set the scene for you. It was at a place called Kadesh. It is one place I am sure Moses could wish they had never visited. At Kadesh there was no water. He had gone through this before; in fact, at Rephidim years earlier there had been no water, and God told Moses to take his rod and strike the rock and call forth water. Water came out. At Kadesh the same scenario repeated, no water, but God says to Moses to take his rod and Aaron and go and speak to the rock and call forth water. Moses, however, was angry and fed up with the people’s constant complaining, so instead of just speaking to the rock, he struck it twice. Water came out. But this time at a terrible price to Moses, God forbade him to go into the land of promise.

Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy, blames his anger and the people for getting him angry. In that moment of anger, he stopped resting, he stopped trusting in Christ’s sufficiency, and he started trusting in his own sufficiency. Moses said, “Ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” The reference to “we” was not God and him, rather Moses was talking about his brother Aaron and himself. He did not give God the credit for the water coming out. In other words, he did not glorify God. In a fit of anger and pride, he stopped trusting God’s explicit instructions. Pride is the opposite of humility, and humility is an integral ingredient of faith. At that moment Moses was not desperately depending upon his God. He was depending upon the miraculous power that seemed to have been invested in his life.

God spoke to Moses and said,

Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. (Numbers 20:12)

“Because ye believed me not,” let that sink down in to your heart. Moses was a man of faith. When we get to Hebrews eleven, we are going to read a lot about the great faith that Moses had. Yet, in a moment with pride, he didn’t rest. Not only did Moses not get to go into the Promised Land, but Aaron, Moses’ brother, and his sister, Miriam, also died in the wilderness. These regenerate, redeemed and believing Jews died along with all of those unregenerate, unredeemed, and unbelieving Jews. As we said this morning, only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to go into the Promised Land. But not Moses.

You might remind me that the text of Hebrews chapter three and verse nineteen is not dealing with Moses’ transgression, it is dealing with faith in Christ. I would quickly concur. It is dealing with salvation. But, dear friend, when I read that verse a few weeks ago, I could not help but think also that because of unbelief Moses did not get to experience all of the promises of God. Please listen to me. The rest of Christ is, as we have already stated, a faith in the completed work of Jesus on the cross. But, secondly, resting in Christ goes beyond the moment you are saved. It is a faith in the continual work of Christ’s redemption in your everyday life. The cross just doesn’t forgive us of our past sins. It also is the strength by which Christ ministers to us, to work in our lives, to develop us, and to cause us to continue to walk faithfully before Him.

I am not going to walk faithful before the Lord, without Him doing something in me, even though He has saved me and His Spirit lives within me. That is the truth. It is the truth about me, and it is the truth about you. You will not live faithful for God apart from God. You would think you would walk faithfully in obedience as one would drive the car down the interstate. But no, you are going to find the first exit you can. That is what your flesh will want to do. That is the nature of the flesh. It is rebellious. It does not want to walk in the straight and narrow. The flesh says, “I don’t like God telling me what to do. I don’t like God telling me how I must live and how I must walk.” Thank God that His spirit is in us giving us a new spirit that says “I want to follow Him wherever he will lead me.” Unless you walk by the same faith that you trusted for the forgiveness of sin, you will fall, stumble and disobey, coming short of many promises that God has made for you.

I didn’t say you would lose your salvation. I said, you would come short of seizing and receiving many of the promises that God has made to you, just like Moses came short of a promise because of unbelief. Your rest in Christ can be disrupted, and when it gets disrupted it is because you are not trusting.

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:12)

The word promise is plural; it is “promises.” God has many promises. Dear friend, it is our business to find every promise on God’s tree and pick it, eat it, and enjoy it. Don’t be satisfied with one or two. Dear Sir, the tree is loaded with fruit. God has an abundant number of promises and tonight some of you need to eat of a promise that God has given to you. Believe all the promises, because if you don’t, you will come short of what God intends. Your rest will not be as restful.

We said this morning that the Promised Land is not a type of heaven. You need to get rid of that in your theology if you want to understand the book of Hebrews. Canaan land is not a type or shadow of heaven. It is a shadow of Jesus. Particularly, it is a type of the life of a Christian, who once being saved, is now being progressively sanctified. It can’t be a type of heaven because the Bible nowhere says that it is. You have to be careful with typology. If the Bible doesn’t call the thing under consideration a type or allude to it as a type, then caution must be exercised.

Another reason why Canaan cannot be a type of heaven is because Canaan had to be conquered and taken from the heathen that occupied the land. When Israel got to the Promised Land what was facing them there? Giants, walled cities, idolaters, do not constitute as far as I am concerned, a good type of heaven. In fact, it was these very things that discouraged the people from obeying God forty years earlier.

They did not get to rest once they crossed over Jordan. Hardly so, the work had just started, had it not? They now had to occupy the land and claim it as their own. A relevant passage of Scripture found in Exodus chapter twenty-three, verses twenty-seven through verse thirty may shed some light on the question.

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. (Exodus 23:27-30)

This is what the Lord God had promised He would do for Israel as they entered the land and occupied it.

If there is a type to be found in entering and occupying the Promised Land it is a type of progressive sanctification. Justification has brought the removal of the guilt of sin and we have been declared righteous, but the believer is not righteous or perfect in his thoughts or living. The Spirit of sanctification must be at work chiseling, sanding, scraping, and conforming the Christian into the image of Jesus Christ. Old thought patterns are still prevalent and must be reprogrammed. This is the command of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter twelve and verse two, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Entering into Canaan is a type of the Christian life. I want you to know Jesus moved in December 1, 1986, into this old land called Michael Durham. But for these last fourteen years He has been defeating and driving out the enemy. By His grace and mercy I am more like Jesus today than I was fourteen years ago. One by one the enemies of God will be conquered in your life. We are transported as Paul says from “glory unto glory.” Getting saved, it is a glorious thing, but God is not done the moment He saves a sinner; He has to transform him or her into more glory.

I say more glory because what God wants is to increase your ability to participate in His glory. To participate, I mean, to be able to glory in Him more and more, and one day be able to exist in the consuming fire of His glory. Our greatest delight is to be in the glory of His presence. But in order for you to experience His unlimited, infinite and consuming glory, He must eliminate all the things you fill your life with that are not glorious. These things do not satisfy. Therefore the process of sanctification is showing us that nothing satisfies like Jesus. Sanctification is the pursuit of the experiencing of God’s glory.

“Let us therefore labor.” What is labor? I come back to the two words that is shaping and changing my life, “Desperate Dependency”. That is what laboring here is all about. That is the labor. It is simply becoming so desperate for God to work in your life because you know that you cannot do it. We turn to Him; we have no other place to turn. We need God!

As long as you have some place else to turn, as long in your mind you’ve got some place else to turn, you are not doing the work or labor of faith. It does not matter that you are praying and asking God to do something, if desperate dependency is not in you, He is going to wait. He will always wait. But when you know that He is your sufficiency, to the point you get desperate, you will then cling to Him. Then He moves on your behalf, and His glory is released. That is the labor of rest. Again, I call it the work of faith.

I want to conclude by giving you an illustration. I hope it answers some things for you. Let us suppose that you have left your home and you are on your way to town. You have no ride. Upon your back is a very heavy load. As you are walking along the roadside making your way to town, you tire quickly because the load is very heavy. The sun is hot. You get thirsty. Your energy dwindles. You begin to hope someone will take pity upon you. You stick out your thumb and wait. Finally a car slows down just ahead of you and they back up. Your anticipation and your excitement begin to build, “Oh, finally, I can get off my feet. I can rest all the way into town.” The good samaritan motions for you to get in. You thank him for his hospitality and you get into the car. But to the amazement of the driver, you never take off the heavy load that you have strapped to your back. You sit in his car as he takes you to town, but you still strain under the heavy load. The driver asks you about taking the large pack off and you say, “Oh no, I could not ask you or your vehicle to carry my load. This is for me to carry by myself.”

Some of you have rested in Christ. You got in Christ and He is taking you to the city He has built. However, you have issues or heavy loads you are carrying right now. You are resting in Jesus, trusting Him to take you to the paradise He is building for all the saints. But you are also

straining under a load of personal issues and problems. You are trying your best to fix whatever is wrong in you or your situations. You trust Christ for the forgiveness of sin and rest in His finished work on the cross. But as you rest in Him for such mercy, you strain to carry your cares which the same Jesus said to cast upon Him. How much sense does that make?

You are like Israel who said, "It is up to me to kill the giants and conquer the land." This is why they refused to go in the first place, because they did not trust God to empower them to do it. When some of the unbelieving company realized they had disobeyed God, they took it upon their own backs to invade and conquer. Moses warned them to not go because God would not be with them. Nevertheless, they went over Jordan and by their own hand tried to conquer the giants. They were soundly defeated.

You cannot obtain the promises by your own might or determination. Religion is not the hand that secures the promise. Only faith can grasp all the promises that God has for us. God not only has promised the forgiveness of sin, but He has also promised victory over sin. Our work is to believe God for the victory. We are to obey the command to conquer, but not in the power of our strength. Obedience to His commands is to be the product of faith not flesh.

If you have not trusted and rested in Christ, may I tell you that His vehicle of grace has room for you. You need not be weary of the trying to get into heaven anymore. I tell you Jesus has done all the work for you. It is for you to rest in His labor of love. It is for you to cling to Him and believe that He is able to save you to the uttermost. Your labor is the labor of faith. It is the labor of rest. Rest in Christ and conquer the land. Amen.