

A worthy resolution - entering God's rest

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we're thankful that we can count on you being here with us. Lord, as we open your word, you are ministering to our hearts and in our minds in ways that we don't even know.

And we ask that you would do your will at this time, that you would humble us before you, so that we can have joy that is eternal, joy that is beyond what the world can give.

So Lord, would you meet with us at this time, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. So if you're like me, you're on vacation, and it's great.

You've probably been looking forward to this time for a very, very long time. I know that I have. I know that the year was kind of difficult with studies and with work, and I'm sure that you've felt that as well.

Well, maybe I'm looking forward, maybe I was looking forward to this vacation because I was working too hard. I was overworked throughout the semester. I don't know. Maybe it's just because I'm a creature who loves to rest.

[1 : 0 4] And so here we are, resting. And if you're like me, next week you're going to catch yourself looking at your schedule to see when is the next time you're going to have a break, next time that you're going to have a vacation, so you can start planning for it.

We just love rest. That's just the way that we are made. You probably heard when Matthew was reading the Bible that it talked about rest quite a bit.

And if you're not a Christian, you might be kind of uncomfortable with the notion that God gives rest. Maybe if you're not a Christian, you're thinking that God is a judge.

God is a God who sees everything, and he is waiting to just snap on us. He's waiting to judge us and condemn us. How can somebody rest when there's a God like that? And so we're going to look at that today.

We're going to look at this passage in Hebrews, which talks about rest. So if you have your Bibles with you, you can turn with me. I would be a great help if you can turn to Hebrews chapter 4. We're going to start at verse 1.

[2 : 0 6] And while you're turning there, I'm just going to give a little bit of a background to the letter of Hebrews. Basically what's happening here, there's a lot of speculation. We don't know who the author is particularly, but there is...

So we kind of understand this letter to the Hebrews as a sermon. So basically what we're doing is we're reading somebody else's sermon. But we're at this part in the sermon where it's talking about rest, and the threat is that the culture is putting a lot of pressure on the Christians to abandon Jesus, to go back to maybe Judaism or go back to the ways of the culture.

So let's look at that in verse 1. It says, Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

So here it is. The promise of entering his rest. The promise of entering God's rest, that is. It still stands. And so it kind of seems like a shock that God would want rest for people when he maybe is the God who is so demanding.

So let's... Andrew, if we can have our first point. I think... Or... Yes, thank you. That's the second point. So our first point is, God loves rest and promised to share his rest with ordinary and extraordinary people alike.

[3 : 35] God loves rest and promised to share his rest with ordinary and extraordinary people alike. We usually, in our points, we usually have ordinary people. I put extraordinary people, just in case you associate more with extraordinary, so that everyone here is in the picture.

So God loves rest and promised to share his rest with ordinary and extraordinary people alike. Now, doesn't the Bible care more about judging people and telling people what to do? This is kind of the question that we were wondering at first.

We'll see later on as the theme of rest develops. But just to give a small little picture of what it means for God to have a rest for us. When...

Well, I'm a musician. Some of you know that. I love playing music. I play the French horn. And I've recorded on some albums. And one of the most exciting things when we're recording, we love to play music together.

We love to do the process. But at the end, when we're done, we love to listen to the music. We love to see the final product. And I think this is the picture of rest that the Bible is trying to paint, is that God creates everything, and now he dwells.

[4 : 45] His presence falls on creation so that he can appreciate all the work that he has done. And not just by himself. He created human beings to appreciate it with. And so this is the biblical picture of God's rest, that God dwells with his people in full delight, with them, enjoying the creation and the benefits of the creation.

So let's read verse 1 again. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

Now you're probably thinking, hold on a minute. Fear so that we can enter rest? Like, fear, like, that's usually, like, something that is completely contrary to rest. Like, when I fear, I'm restless.

Like, I don't want to fear so that I can enter a rest. Like, that doesn't really make sense. And maybe you're thinking of the old Lucasfilm proverb from a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, where this little green guy said, fear leads to anger, and anger leads to hate, and hate leads to the dark side.

Like, doesn't that seem more consistent with reality? That fear leads to something like that. Fear leads to anger and hate and all those things. How can the Bible say that fear leads to rest?

[6 : 03] Well, basically what's happening here is that the writer is continuing an argument that started in the previous chapter. He's saying, fear your sinful hearts.

Fear the ability of your heart to sin against God. See, fear is maybe not so much of a bad thing. The Bible talks about it in two ways. And you can read the blog.

There's a lot more detail on that. I wrote a blog on fear and the fear of the Lord. And so you can refer to that. But basically, fear here is not to paralyze us spiritually.

God doesn't want us to be paralyzed spiritually so that we can enter rest. That's not what it's talking about. It's talking about a fear that produces spiritual diligence, that we are diligent in doing God's will.

See, when I was young, I was taught to fear fire, fear the element on the stove, because I would get burned.

[7 : 02] But that doesn't mean that heat is evil, that heat is bad to be avoided in all cases. We need to master it. We need to master heat so that we can use it for good purposes.

And so here, the thread of the argument that it's trying to say is that we need to fear our hearts and the deception of sin that comes into our hearts.

So if we can have our second point. One of the wisest things that a mentor told me once is that he said, Jonathan, one of the things that we don't fear is our hearts, is our sin.

See, it's amazing that when we look here at verse 2, let's read verse 2. It says here, For good news came to them.

Good news came to Israel, that God would deliver them from slavery and bring them to a land of prosperity and security. And now here, the good news is coming to us, that Jesus, when he died on the cross and rose again and ascended to heaven, he delivers us from the slavery of sin to bring us into a heavenly rest now.

[8 : 30] And when we go to heaven to be in his presence, we'll have rest for eternity. And we can miss that. We can miss that because our hearts can deceive us. Our hearts can love sin more than loving the God who has done everything for us to enjoy eternal delight in his presence.

Our hearts are sinful and restless until they find themselves in the God of purity and rest. One of the things that people critique about Christianity is that, you know, in order to be a Christian, you need to have those same kind of views on morality and politics and all those things.

But it's actually, that's not really the case. That's not the case at all, actually. Let's look at verse 2 again. To be a Christian, it's not just kind of saying, well, you're not at a buffet and saying, well, I associate more with this religion or this spirituality or this Christianity.

When we come to Jesus, we come to the realization that we are sinful beings and that God paid for our sins to make us right with himself. We have nothing to boast about, only the cross.

That God would so love the world, send his son for us. So looking at verse 2 again, there's this thing here that it's talking about, that though the good news came to them, the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

[10 : 14] Before I was a Christian, I had all these strange ideas about God. Even though I was kind of raised in the church and I was taught certain things about the Bible, I thought that by virtue of having, you know, being raised in a maybe Catholic home and having gone to a good school and being part of a good family and having, you know, a grandfather who was religious and having friends that are religious, I thought that somehow God would have mercy on me.

Just for having those things, being in the right circles, being born of the right family and all those things. But what this is saying is that it's not about that.

It's not about being part of the right family, being part of the right background or all those things. What verse 2 is trying to tell us is that it's not about our group, not our social class, our religious experience, our sexual orientation, whether we're generous or whether we're frugal.

The fact that you've prayed before, the fact that you've maybe thought you never needed to pray. It's not those things that will bring God's favor upon us. What it's saying is that salvation is a free gift from God that we simply receive by faith and that we walk by faith.

Salvation is a free gift from God that we receive by faith and we must walk in faith. So this verse here is kind of alluding to Numbers 14 in the Old Testament.

[11 : 46] Numbers is one of the books in the Old Testament and tells the story of Israel, how there were people who were part of this community who received salvation from God, who were taken out of the land of slavery and they were walking with Moses who believed, they were walking with Joshua and Caleb who believed, but they didn't benefit, they didn't enter the promised land because they didn't believe.

So it's possible to be part of this group of the church actually, it's possible to be part of the church, to go to the church on Sundays, to even drive maybe an hour to get here and to do your duty to be here and yet not believe.

So this text is trying to move us to the place of faith in the heart, in the mind, where do we actually believe? Do we put our faith and trust in Jesus alone? So let's, if we can have our next point.

So God delivers sinners and promises them rest after faithfulness through the desert. So this is the picture that it's trying to paint here. So if you're a Christian and you've been wondering why you feel like your faith is dry like the desert sand, maybe you're dissatisfied with Christianity.

You've walked as a Christian for some time and now you're just struggling with not being content. This is actually a fairly common thing and I think a lot of Christians do experience that and the reality is that we don't know what to do about it.

[13 : 19] We don't know how to talk about it. We feel like if we're going to talk about it, people are going to think we're lesser of a Christian. There was a time when I was going through that and I went to go see a Christian counselor, which was a very good thing for me to do.

And what they did to help me was that they used this imagery that the text here is showing that God saves us from slavery, that God saves us and he prepares us for the promised land, eternal rest in his presence.

And so I was in the desert season of my walk with the Lord. I was going through desert season and I could no longer remember the salvation that he had given me.

I was thinking through how I've sinned and my question was, does God reject me or is God finished with me? So the question is, is there hope if you're a Christian and you've sinned and now you feel restless over your sin?

Well, let's look at verse 3. We'll be able to find something here in verse 3 that might be able to help us. For we who have believed, verse 3, for we who have believed, enter that rest.

[14 : 32] As he has said, as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. And what the writer here is doing is that he's using a negative to prove a positive. He's saying, they shall not enter my rest as though there is still a rest to be entered.

And that's what we'll see here. That's what he's trying to say. So 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.

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, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience. Again, he appoints a certain day, today, saying through David so long afterward in the words already quoted.

So what this passage is saying is that there is a theme in the Bible for rest. That God, when he created the world in six days, on the seventh day, he stopped his work to rest.

[15 : 43] And it wasn't just to stop doing work. It was to come into creation. The word rest also implies that God's presence fell onto creation. It came down into creation to dwell with human beings, to see what was going on there, and to delight in the presence of human beings.

And now, because of the fall, human beings have sinned against God. And we can't experience that rest anymore. We're separated from God, or sin separates us from God. And now, God is the God who is calling a people to himself to save them, to make them experience that rest again, to restore things, so that things can be like in the paradise of Genesis 2.

And now, when Jesus comes into, as an Israelite, comes to live perfectly under the law, he comes to live and die on the cross, and in doing so, he breaks the power of the curse so that we can experience rest.

So that, friends, when you put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts. The Holy Spirit comes and gives us the assurance of God's love and gives us this experience of deep rest in our hearts.

and what is happening here is that it's eternity breaking in to time and space into our hearts. There's a rest that's still to come, a rest that is at the end when we die or when Jesus returns, there's a rest there that is still to come.

[17 : 07] But when we believe in Jesus, when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, there's the rest that comes and breaks into this cursed creation, this broken body of ours.

And so we get a glimpse of what it means to rest in God even now. And so if we can have our next point, God's rest in Messiah is for me if I do not harden my heart to his voice.

So how do I enter this rest that the text talks about? How do I enter this eternal rest in the presence of God? Well, first of all, let's look at 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, saying through David so long afterward in the words already quoted, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

So what do we do? Well, this text is saying don't harden your hearts. And, gosh, that's hard. How do I not harden my heart?

[18 : 24] It starts with prayer. It starts with prayer. God, come into my heart. God, make your dwelling into my heart. Soften my heart to your word. And when we're walking the Christian life, same prayer.

God, have mercy on me. God, you know that I've sinned. Pour out your Holy Spirit. Soften my heart to your voice. God wants you to experience rest.

This text is saying that rest is still available to you. Whether you've never given your life to Jesus or whether you've given your life to Jesus this morning or ten years ago or whether you don't even know when you gave your life to Jesus, you've always known Jesus.

His rest is available to you. So let's look at verse 8. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.

There's something really interesting in this passage here. Joshua brought the people of Israel into the promised land and yet it's saying that they did not have rest.

[19 : 29] How is that possible? How is it possible to go into the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of economic prosperity, of political stability and security from all your enemies and still not have rest?

How is that possible? Well, again, this text is saying that it's about softening our hearts before God to his voice and so we will experience rest.

The people, when they entered the land, they did not experience that rest because they did not obey the voice of the Lord. See, it's interesting that in our lives we tend to pursue things like, you know, maybe some form of comfort.

We pursue rest. We pursue partying and just enjoying life and yet we seem even more restless. How is it possible? And it presents a human problem that we can have prosperity and we can have security in all these earthly goods and yet have no rest.

The problem is that we try to satisfy our deepest longings in things that are temporal of no eternal value. Now, whether you're a millennial and searching to make a difference in life and that's your life goal or whether you're a professional trying to earn a living or whether you are retired and hoping to find rest from your labors, now these are all good pursuits but if that's your only pursuit you will not find rest.

[21 : 08] There is no rest in these things because they're not meant to satisfy. I like to share the story of when I was a child and I used to play in the basement with my brother and we had this big, big metal treasure chest just where we were playing hide and seek and I used to walk by and think like wow my parents have this huge inheritance for me like they have gold in there and diamonds and I'm going to inherit that one day and one day I found out when they opened the treasure chest that it was only linens and covers and all that and I was so disappointed.

Can you blame me? I was so disappointed. Why is that? Because in a treasure chest we don't put linens we put treasures. It's a treasure chest.

And so we go through life disappointed. We walk the Christian life disappointed. Why? Because we feed our hearts with things that aren't supposed to go there.

With treasures that aren't supposed to fill our longings. It's God who fulfills our hearts. It's to be known by God and to know him that fulfills our deepest longings.

Now I wanted to make sure that it's not only Christians who feel that way. So I looked up this song by Mick Jagger who sang the song I Can't Get No Satisfaction and he repeats it for minutes and minutes and apparently this song resonated with a lot of people.

[22 : 38] A lot of people don't get satisfaction no matter how many times that they try and they try and they try. See he tells in this song how entertainment how riches how relationships and even sexual relationships cannot satisfy him.

they cannot satisfy him. That's because our only rest and satisfaction is in knowing God and being known by him.

So you're probably thinking boy that's the most depressing New Year's sermon I've ever heard. We're not done. So let's turn to verse 9. To verse 9.

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. So here it's talking about a Sabbath rest and you might have noticed that a few other times that I talked about rest it didn't talk about Sabbath rest.

Now it's talking about Sabbath rest and even the Greek word is different. Here it's sabbatismos. Don't ask me what that means. Well actually you can ask me what that means. I looked it up. I did my homework. It means Sabbath rest.

[23 : 50] Okay. So the implication here it's actually it's from a Jewish word that says that is when we say it it's Shabbat Shabbat. Sabbath Sabbath.

And when we repeat it twice it means ultimate Sabbath. This is not just any type of Sabbath. This is a celebration. It's an eternal celebration. A festive celebration with God.

See the Jewish people used to celebrate the well they still do actually to this day. They celebrate the Sabbath on the Sabbath day which starts Friday at sundown and goes all the way through Saturday.

And some of you have been to a Sabbath dinner. We've done that over the years. And what happens at the Sabbath dinner is that we have the company of our friends. We have wine.

We have fresh bread. And we have a meal together. We sing songs. We pray. We do all these great things and it's so much fun. And here the text is saying that there remains a Sabbath celebration for the people of God.

[24 : 50] That God's intention is that we would experience the eternal delight of his presence now and forever. That when we put our faith and trust in Jesus we can experience his Sabbath rest.

That's what awaits us. See in a world that is so hopeless and so restless Christians can have hope. Christians can have rest.

Christians can know for sure that because Jesus died and rose again and promised us rest that we will have rest. There's not many people who die and rise from the dead.

But when somebody does you better listen. So maybe some of you are looking forward to tonight. You're looking forward to your New Year's celebration.

It's going to be fun. There's going to be friends, family, maybe pop a bottle of champagne and there's going to be a warm fire, nice dinner and maybe even fireworks. And this is great.

[25 : 50] But tomorrow morning if you party a lot, if you party enough you'll realize that there's only so much that these earthly rests and earthly parties and celebrations can do.

There's only so much that they can satisfy. You might feel really, really tired and it might be hard to get out of bed tomorrow depending on how much you party. And that's just going to prove to us that these things only point to these parties, these celebrations only point forward to God's rest.

Only point forward to this eternal rest where we will never be tired of celebrating in God's presence. So if we can have our next point. God's rest is eternal in quality and length for us now by faith in the crucified Messiah.

Now what this point is trying to say is that the quality of the rest is eternal. We don't understand that. We're so stuck in time and space but it's when eternity breaks in and it's available to us now by faith in the crucified Messiah.

So God is inviting you to this rest. Now let's read verse 10 again. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

[27 : 16] Now there's an interesting parallel here that's trying to show that there's a future rest for Christians in the presence of God in the new creation where there will be no more toil or anxious work trying to make a living nor will we need to strive anxiously for holiness.

All we'll know is holiness. All we'll know is the delight of purity in our hearts. See, we spend so much time working and doing all these activities that are fun whether you're an artist you love to make music or paint or these things and these are great things but the problem is that we lash onto it.

We put our identity in them and the cross severs that. The cross helps us to find our identity in God. As we conclude let's look at verse 11 with a final exhortation.

Verse 11 reads Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience for the word of God is alive and active sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to the division of soul and of spirit of joints and of marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart and no creature is hidden from his sight but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Now before anyone goes out of here to try to make things right so they can have good rest before anyone goes out to find a new job or quit their job or find new friends and all that what the text here is trying to say this exhortation is saying is moving us to strive to enter that rest is saying go to God's word go to God's word and let God's word go to your heart go to God's word and let his word go to your heart.

[29 : 23] See verse 13 says no creature is hidden from his sight but all are naked and exposed to his eyes to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. See if you're not a Christian here today and you read something like this it might be frightening to you and you know reading that I would be frightened too but when you're a Christian when you put your faith in Jesus this verse brings comfort that you are completely known by the God who created all things and created all things for rest that you can be in his presence fully seen fully known your heart your mind your thoughts everything known to God yet loved and cherished.

See since the fall this picture is of the fall in the garden where Adam and Eve walked before God naked and unashamed and when they sinned they became ashamed they saw their nakedness and they wanted to hide from God so what they did is that they put fig leaves on them on themselves to hide them to hide their bodies to hide their shame before God and humanity has been doing that ever since that we've been trying to hide our shame from God that we're trying to get rest from God because we know that he sees us we know that he sees our hearts we know that he sees our thoughts and it's led us to do stupid things really we try to hide from God and we try to start all sorts of weird religions that are causing more anxiety spiritualities that are that are just causing more restlessness and we see the culmination of that that when we don't allow God to expose to come into our hearts when we don't expose ourselves to God we see the culmination of that when Jesus came and he was crucified by the religious leaders in Israel and the Roman soldiers they crucified him they crucified the son of God they tried to get rest from the son of God so they killed him on the cross what they didn't know what they did not know is that Jesus is the great high priest who entered heaven what they did not know is that Jesus is the one who came to fix them to fix their problem to clothe them with righteousness and that's what he does at the cross is that he died for those people who killed him and he died for you and me today see when Jesus as the great high priest the priest is the one who intermediates the presence of God and humanity and when Jesus was crucified he didn't shed the blood of an animal he shed his own blood his sinless blood so that by his blood we can be forgiven completely and we can experience that rest of God that rest that eternal quality of rest see in 2018 the year that's coming ahead we're going to have a lot of pressure as Christians to turn away from the faith to walk away and to try to find rest in things that do not give rest the things of the world maybe passions and riches and all those things and it's going to even use force it's going to maybe people are going to try to push you away from your jobs and going to try to put pressure on you to abandon that but what this is saying is that you're going to if you give up Jesus you're going to give up rest eternal rest now and forever so please stand just to conclude here

I'm going to read the next three verses that follow the text that we've looked at and it's going to help us to understand the gospel so at verse 14 since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens Jesus the son of God let us hold fast our confession for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need let us pray Father thank you that you have done everything for us to come into your rest that Lord when we try to find rest in things that don't satisfy you come and you you've done everything for us to be in a right relationship with you so that we can experience that rest and so that we can look forward to being in an eternal rest with you

Lord would you lighten our eyes and our hearts to that reality help us to to be more affectionate with Jesus to be faithful to Jesus to persevere to the end Lord give us grace give us mercy we come to your throne in the name of Jesus with that the plea Lord in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen