

Entering God's Rest

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[0 : 00] Today, as we hear your voice, our Heavenly Father, help us not to harden our hearts, but to receive, believe, and live in light of your word. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I don't know if you noticed, but today's passage is very much about God's rest. Did you get that? Did you notice the repetition of rest? And if I asked you what comes to mind when you think rest, I wonder what you would say. Would it be a lazy day and then nine holes on the golf course, swinging the club without any back pain, getting holes in one every single time?

Would it be going and having a day of pampering at a day spa? I'm just trying to put myself in the other gender's shoes here. I've got no idea. What would it be for you? I asked my Bible study group last week what rest meant for them.

One guy who has children said rest was a distant memory. For another, it was actually having the energy to rest, to do something enjoyable and be refreshed from that enjoyable activity.

For another, it was, and I quote, lying on a banana lounge by a white sandy beach with some sun and a gentle breeze, the sound of waves softly rolling up the shore.

[1 : 36] And he spoke like that. And we all went, and for me, it's saying, kids, can you please clean up your rooms? And then responding with, right away, dad, we'd love to.

I wonder what rest means for you. More importantly, I guess, what does rest mean according to the Bible? Well, in the Bible, rest refers to two main things.

So on this next slide, it refers firstly to living in a right relationship with God, and secondly, living in a right place with peace and prosperity.

So let me give you a very brief biblical theology or biblical survey of rest to show you that. So starting in Genesis, we see both these things. Remember, how many days did God created the world in?

Six. Well done. Yeah, okay. I'm just going to ask you some questions to see if you're with me. And on the seventh day, he rested. That's right. And he rested on the seventh day, and he made it holy, or he set the seventh day apart as special, because he had finished his work of creating.

[2 : 46] In other words, he'd reached his goal of creation. And this seventh day was different from every other day, because every other day had an evening and a morning the next day.

But the seventh day had no evening, no morning, no eighth day. And so the idea in Genesis chapter one and two is that this seventh day of rest was meant to go on forever.

That's the idea. It was meant to go on forever, where people would enjoy a right relationship with God in a right place. And we see that in Genesis, don't we? Adam and Eve have a right relationship with God.

They obey his word, at least to start with. And they enjoyed living in a right place in the Garden of Eden, ruling over the animals where there is a richness and a lusciousness of life.

It is peace and prosperity. And of course, in chapter three of Genesis, sin spoils everything. And so Adam and Eve leave the garden, don't they? They're no longer in the right place.

[3 : 44] And their relationship with God is fractured, broken. So no longer do they have a right relationship. Instead, what happens is war and suffering and disease and so on.

And we move from Genesis to Exodus, where God gave his people the Sabbath day, which was to remind them of God's rest back in creation, back in Genesis. And it particularly focused on having a right relationship with God, the Sabbath day did.

And then from Exodus, we move to Joshua, where God gave his people also the land he promised, do you remember? And the promised land of Canaan is also referred to as a resting place or an inheritance.

So on the next slide, we read from Deuteronomy, You, Israel, have not yet reached, this is before they enter the promised land, have not yet reached the resting place or literally the rest and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you.

And so the point here is the promised land that Joshua ended up bringing the people into is described as rest. And this land was prosperous. Do you remember how it was described?

[4 : 52] A land flowing with milk and honey, an idea of prosperity. And in this land, and particularly under King Solomon, there was rest, peace as well.

God gave them rest from all their enemies, we are told. And so this promised land became both a place of prosperity, flowing with milk and honey, and peace, rest from enemies. And so this land, this resting place, it was almost like we'd reached the Garden of Eden again.

People were living in the midst of God at the temple, and there was peace from enemies and there was prosperity. But of course, it didn't last long, did it? Sin spoiled things again.

And so we jump forward this time from Solomon to Jesus. Jesus came and he fulfilled the Sabbath, for Jesus gives rest to his people now, in terms of relationship, doesn't he?

Do you remember what Jesus said? Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest.

Yeah. He gives us rest in terms of right relationship.

[5 : 52] He brings us forgiveness so that we can be right with God. But Jesus also offers us entry into the right place, what the Bible calls heaven, our heavenly inheritance.

And at the moment, it's heaven, and when Jesus returns, it will be heaven on earth. It will be a renewed earth where there will be peace and prosperity. No more persecution, but peace.

No more pain or suffering or crying for the old order of things has passed away, says Revelation.

Now, it's this idea of rest as a place that is primarily on view here in Hebrews.

This is the rest that the writer does not want his readers to miss out on. This is the rest that we enter by believing Jesus. And so we are to keep believing in Jesus until we enter it.

And that's the big idea of this passage this morning. And to encourage his fellow Christians to keep believing, to keep persevering in faith until heaven, the writer firstly points them to the positive example of Jesus, which is point one, verse one.

[6 : 59] Have a look there in your Bibles. He says, Therefore, holy brothers and sisters who share in the, notice this, the heavenly calling, the place of rest, fix your thoughts on Jesus, he says, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.

He says, fix your thoughts on Jesus. In other words, consider Christ. Think about him. But what exactly is it about him we are to think about?

Well, he'll talk about him being our priest next week, but he tells us what he wants us to think about in verse two. He says, you see, Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

You see, he wants his readers, wants us to consider the faithfulness of Christ. Jesus was faithful to his father, trusted his father, even to death on a cross.

And so the implication is, follow his example. Just as Jesus had faith in his father, so you readers have faith in Jesus.

[8 : 05] Be faithful like Jesus. But of course, the readers could think, well, yeah, we will be faithful, but we're not going to be faithful to Jesus. We're going to be faithful to Judaism. Do you remember there were Jews who became Christians?

There was suffering persecution. And so they're tempted to give up on Jesus and go back to the Old Testament Judaism that they once followed. And so to make sure that they have faith in the right person, the writer says, consider also not just Jesus's faithfulness, but Jesus's greatness.

Do you see verse three? He says, Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house is greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.

Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the son over God's house.

You see the comparison he's making between Jesus and Moses? Both are faithful. Yes, but Jesus is greater. Moses is a servant.

[9 : 19] Jesus is the son. Moses is in the house. The son is over the house. We have some friends who work overseas and they have a servant at home, which sounds all very luxurious to us here.

But in the country that they are working in, it is very poor and labor is cheap. And they've essentially hired this person just so they can give someone a job because employment is difficult. But this servant would never dream of telling our friends what to do. It's our friend's house. They're the owners of the house. So the servant would never dream of telling our friends what to do. But the servant would never dream of telling our friend's son what to do either. For the son is the son of the owner. Do you see? And so also with Jesus and Moses, the son is greater than the servant.

Jesus is greater than Moses. And so the writer is saying, why would you ignore the son Jesus to go back and follow the servant Moses when the servant answers to the son anyway?

[10:27] In fact, Jesus' superiority is highlighted because in verse six, he is called Christ, which means king. And it's the first time he is called Christ in Hebrews so far. The writer is saying, look, he is greater.

And so keep having faith, yes, but have faith in Christ. That's his point. And by having faith in Christ, we are part of God's house.

If, though, we keep having faith. Did you see the rest of verse six? He says, and we are his house. If indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

You see, a genuine Christian, a genuine member of God's house is one who will keep trusting in Jesus to the very end. Who will hold their confidence in Christ until their death.

So we had to consider Christ who was faithful to the father to his death. And so be faithful to Jesus to our death until we enter God's heavenly rest until our future hope of heaven becomes a present reality.

[11:39] Well, the writer moves now from the positive example of Jesus's faithfulness to the negative example of Israel's unfaithfulness. Point to verse seven. So as the Holy Spirit says today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in rebellion.

During the time of testing in the wilderness where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for 40 years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation.

I said their hearts are always going astray and they have not known my ways. And so I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest.

Here the writer quotes Psalm 95, which was our first reading. And in Psalm 95, it refers to a time when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt towards the promised land.

And on the way to the promised land, they doubted God that God would provide food and water for them. And so they grumbled against God. And then when they got to the promised land, do you remember they sent out spies to look through the land and they saw it was a very good land.

[12:52] But there were very big people in the land already. And so how could God possibly give them the land? And do you remember every one of those spies did not believe God could do it except two.

Can you remember who those two were? Joshua and Caleb. Yeah, that's right. Joshua and Caleb were the only ones who believed God could do it. And so despite everything, despite God showing them the 10 plagues in Egypt, parting the Red Sea, showing them all this power, they still did not believe that God could provide for them.

In fact, it says in Numbers 14 that they tested God 10 times, almost to reflect the 10 plagues, 10 pieces of evidence that they had to trust God. And in the end, they simply refused to believe God would give them this promised land, this rest.

And so God declared that they would not enter. And so they wandered the wilderness for how many years? Do you remember? 40 years until every adult who did not believe perished.

And then Joshua brought the rest in. And so what the writer is doing is saying, look at that example of unbelief and don't be like it.

[14:08] In fact, that's what David does in Psalm 95 to his own generation. He says, look at our ancestors' unbelief and don't be like it. And the writer says here also, look at that example of unbelief and don't be like it.

Do you see verse 12? See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it's called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

On the next slide, I saw this warning sign. It's a bit cheeky. Any left behind children we sold to the circus? When I saw it, I said to my wife, I wonder who gets the money?

Because I'm tempted. No, no. Now, it's just a silly warning sign, really. But I'll tell you what, this warning sign here is much more serious, isn't it?

If you have an unbelieving heart, then you will miss out on God's rest. And so it says we need to see to it or to be careful that we don't have an unbelieving heart.

[15 : 20] Because sin is deceitful, did you notice? In other words, sin is tricky. It tricks us into thinking that it doesn't really matter. So do you remember Adam and Eve?

Did God really say you cannot eat the fruit of that tree? Do you think you really die if you eat that fruit and disobey God? It tricks you, you see. Or take current examples.

Does it really matter if I don't forgive people? I mean, after all, they really hurt me. Or does it really matter about same-sex marriage? After all, it's a different culture today. Or does it really matter about loving every person we meet?

I mean, they're so different. It doesn't matter if I don't believe bits of God's word. After all, I don't want to be a fundamentalist. Or does it really matter if we think all religions lead to God?

After all, they're nice people. You see, sin tricks us into thinking that it doesn't matter what God says about this or that. And so, you know, we can do what we want and think what we like.

[16 : 21] But what happens is, bit by bit, we harden our heart to that part of God's word, then that part of God's word, then that part of God's word. And very soon, the God we believe in is a very different God to the God of the Bible.

Now, there are all issues tied up with all those things I've mentioned. And they're not as black and white as that. But you see, sin does deceive and trick us into thinking it doesn't matter.

And so for these readers, the sin they were tempted to cave into was the sin of turning from Jesus back to Judaism, back to that religion, and thinking that they would still be right with God.

After all, did not God give Judaism anyway? And so the writer continues with his warning. He says in verse 14, we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the end.

As has just been said today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion. The point here is the same as the first six. The genuine Christian will keep believing to the very end.

[17 : 32] And so he says, make sure you are a genuine Christian. Make sure that you do keep believing to the very end. It's kind of like being rescued from a cliff face. Here's the cliff.

You're on the face. You're stuck there. The helicopter comes across. A line gets lowered down. And the rescuer says, do you believe I can rescue you, save you? You say, yes. You cling to him.

He clings to you. And slowly you're lifted up. And as you're being flown to safety, to rest, it's no good starting to say, you know what? I don't think I believe you can save me anymore.

And then jumping off the rescuer and try and fly home yourself. You're not going to fly very far, are you? Well, not that way. That way you'll fly far and fast. And so it's the same here.

We are to hold on to our belief in Jesus. It's no good saying, yeah, I believe to start with and then not believing down the track. We are to keep believing in Jesus.

[18 : 30] For a genuine Christian is one who keeps believing to the very end. And Israel's problem was they didn't. They started off well. They were saved from Egypt. But then on their way to the promised land, they got hard hearts and stopped believing.

See verse 16? So who was it who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt, all those God saved? And with whom was he angry for 40 years?

Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear they would never enter his rest, if not to those who disobeyed? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of their unbelief.

It's very clear, isn't it? The warning is don't be like them. Don't give way to unbelief. We have doubts with God.

Things happen in life. We have struggles or intellectual problems. Don't let those things harden you. Work through them. Don't give way to unbelief. Otherwise, like Israel, you'll miss out on God's rest.

[19 : 39] But hang on a second. If God's rest was the promised land and the Israelites ended up in there under Joshua, what rest is he talking about for us Christians on this side of history?

Well, the writer points out that the promise of God's rest still remains open for us. At point three, chapter four, verse one, he says, Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us just as they did. But the message they heard was of no value to them because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.

The writer says that God's rest still exists. So make sure we don't fall short of it. Make sure we keep believing.

And you notice, by the way, that genuine belief will lead to obedience. Do you see the end of verse two? It says they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. You see, genuine faith will lead to obedience.

[20 : 47] If they really believe God would give them the land, then they would have obeyed and marched into the land. Or for us, if we really believe Jesus is the one who will bring us to heaven, then we will show it by continuing to follow and obey him to heaven.

Genuine faith leads to obedience. But the point here is that the promise of God's rest still remains open for us. There is a future rest that is promised to us.

And the writer knows this because of Psalm 95 and Genesis 2. Now, he goes on to explain that in verses 3 to 8. But his logic is actually hard to follow.

And so rather than me trying to unpack it poorly now, feel free to ask me later or you can have a look at it on your own. But let's just pick it up in verse 8. He says, He's saying rest still is available for us.

And he calls it a Sabbath rest in verse 9, doesn't he? Now, the original word here for Sabbath rest literally means Sabbath celebration. And his point is, when we enter God's promised heavenly rest, then we'll enjoy the Sabbath celebration.

[22 : 19] The celebration that the weekly Jewish Sabbath pointed to. We will rest from our own work, just like the Jews rested from their regular work on the seventh day of the week. Only in God's heavenly rest, we will permanently rest from all our labor, from all our struggles, from all our difficulties, which we experience in this life.

And it will be an eternal Sabbath celebration. One of eternal joy and praise to God. It will be like Eden again. And like the seventh day of creation, it will never end.

But we're not there yet. Whenever we go on holidays with our kids, you know what question they ask every time? Are we there? Are we there yet?

Yeah. We're not there yet to God's rest. And so we are to keep persevering in the faith. That's the big idea. Do you see verse 11? Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

[23 : 31] Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. And verse 11 is like a summary verse.

It summarizes the encouragement to keep making sure we have faith that we'll enter God's rest.

And it summarizes the warning. Don't be like Israel's example of disobedience and unfaithfulness.

You see, God will know who are genuine believers and who are not. His word will search us thoroughly, joints and marrow, and will hold every person to account.

So keep trusting in Christ. Keep believing and so obeying the Lord Jesus. For he is the greater one. The one who died for you and for me.

The one who rose as king. And the one who will return to bring us all into God's eternal rest. Which will be better than we can imagine. Our son, Tim, competed in his school cross-country race the other week.

[24 : 33] And out of 64 students in his age group, he came 60... No, I won't say what exactly he came. He didn't make it in the top 10, okay? And in that, he takes after his father.

He also takes after me by having bad knees. I've had two knee reconstructions myself. Both knees. And it seems my poor son has inherited. Because as my wife was waiting for him at the finish line, all she could see was poor Tim kind of hobbling along.

Because he had twisted his knee that he inherited from me. But here's the good news. He persevered. Despite the struggle. Despite the pain he was in. He persevered and crossed the line. And rested. Well, fell in a heap and rested. The exhortation to us is to persevere until we cross the line. Until we enter God's rest.

I don't know what struggles you face. Although I know some. As for some of you, it's more than bad knees. Whether it's unbelieving relatives who make life difficult for you.

[25 : 38] Or hostile work environments. Or health issues. Or stage of life. Or marital difficulties. Or things you wish you had. But don't have.

In fact, for some. You've been told you don't have long to live. And yet. Yet you keep trusting in Jesus. And can I say.

I'm incredibly encouraged by that. You're persevering. And so keep going. Keep persevering. And the encouraging thing for us is that we're not alone in this persevering race.

For not only is God with us. But we have each other. Look back. Just for the last verse we'll look at. Look back to chapter 3 verse 13. Chapter 3 verse 13. It says.

You see, we have each other.

[26 : 40] And we are to encourage one another. And I've seen that. Even here at Holy Trinity. I've seen people ring others up. And provide meals. And support one another.

Though I've seen others go by. And miss church. And no one's rang them. And so we need to keep working. And encouraging one another. Helping each other to heaven. So that none of us.

Will fail to reach God's rest. And so today. If you've heard his voice. From his word. Please do not harden your hearts. Like Israel did. Instead continue to believe in the Lord Jesus.

Cling to Christ. And encourage one another to do the same. Until that day. When we stand side by side. And enjoy God's perfect rest.

Together. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father. We do thank you. For the promise of your rest. Of heaven.

[27 : 40] And father we pray though. That you would help us to persevere. Through the struggles of this life. Until we make it to the next. Thank you heavenly father. For your spirit. Which works in us.

To help us. And enable us. And thank you for one another. Whom we can be encouraged by. And whom we can encourage. And so father help us to do that.

Help us to encourage each other. And to persevere. Until that great day. Of your eternal rest. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.