

Entering God's Rest

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2017

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] So, no more animal stories this week. Sorry. Instead, I'm going to start with a question. And if your answer is yes, I would like you to just leave your hands up because there will be a follow-up question.

So here we go. The question is, how many of you have used a GPS, either in your car or in your mobile phone? So, okay, quite a few. Very good.

Keep it up. Now, the follow-up question is, how many of you trust and follow your GPS to the T? Okay, still quite a few.

All right, good. All right, thank you. You can put your hands down now. Now, like some of you, I'm someone that trusts my GPS as well, mostly.

Because sometimes the route it proposes just doesn't make sense. I keep looking at it and it's sort of taking me the long way around. Also, there are times when I'm following the GPS, but then I just can't resist turning off into the side streets, much to Elissa's frustration, because I'm too impatient to wait for that red line.

[1 : 13] So I think I'm going to cut and sort of come back out on the other side. And that's when the GPS lady, it's always a lady, isn't it? She starts pleading with me at the next roundabout, please turn back, please turn back.

At which point I say to her, excuse me, GPS lady, but I'm the driver here. Anyway, tonight we're on a journey of a different kind.

Instead of going from Doncaster to Ballarat, let's say, we're heading for God's eternal rest. And so the voice that we're to listen to isn't the GPS lady, but of Jesus.

But first, let me just say something about our passage tonight. It's fairly long, as you would have heard it read. So we're not going to have time to study it verse by verse. Instead, we're going to cover it section by section, of which there are three main sections, which are points one to three on the outline.

There are also a couple of verses at the end, but I'll deal with those by way of application. So let's begin then in chapter three and verse one, where we learn that faithful Jesus is greater than Moses.

[2 : 23] This, of course, follows on from our previous two weeks, where we learned in week one that Jesus is superior to the angels. Then last week, we learned that Jesus is the greatest human who fulfills Psalm 8 as God intends and rules the world on his behalf.

Well, this week, Jesus is compared with Moses. So in verse one, we read, Now, why this comparison with Moses?

Well, because Jesus was called the pioneer of our salvation in chapter two and verse 10. And when it comes to pioneers of salvation, there's no better archetype than Moses.

Moses, you see, was the one who led Israel out of Egypt, Israel's first and biggest salvation event. And just like Jesus here in verse two, Moses, too, was both appointed by God and sent by him. The word apostle in verse one means just that, the sent one. Further, Moses was also faithful to God as his spokesperson. So in verse five, we read that he was faithful as a servant in all God's house.

[3 : 47] Doing what? Bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. Moses was the lawgiver who ascended to Mount Sinai. He's the one the people asked to speak to God directly because they themselves were afraid to hear God's voice.

And so God himself says of Moses, I've got a quote here from Numbers chapter 12, verse six to eight. The Lord says this of him. Listen to my words. Where there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions.

I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant, Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him, I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles.

He sees the form of the Lord. Now, if you read verses three and five, you see the writer quoting Numbers right here with the same phrase, faithful in all God's house.

And so what he's saying is that of all the prophets through whom God spoke, remember Hebrews chapter one and verse one, Moses stands above them all. Moses alone is the one God speaks face to face.

[4 : 58] But now Jesus comes along as one just as faithful. And he's the greatest spokesperson for the father.

And not only that, he's also obedient to the father, even to suffering and death. We saw that last week and the week before. But verse three, Jesus is also of greater honor than Moses, because whereas Moses was only a servant in God's house, it says, Jesus is a son over his father's house. God, as the builder, is greater than the house he builds. And so is the son he then appoints over it. Now, during World War Two, some of you may be old enough to remember those days.

The queen, that was a joke for someone. During World War Two, the queen served in the Royal Army. So you can see a slide of her. She was an ambulance driver in the auxiliary service.

Now, even though she was just one of many drivers, she was actually more important than all the others. Because as the next in line to the throne, everyone knew that she would one day become queen.

[6 : 08] And then everyone will be serving in her army. That's why it's called Her Majesty's Service. Well, this is the same here with Jesus. He's the son over God's people.

And because of that, he's greater than Moses, who was merely a servant in the house. He was part of God's people, not over God's people. And the writer makes this comparison between Jesus and Moses because he sees parallels to the journey Moses led Israel on out of Egypt.

And the one his readers are now taking because they're believers in Jesus, following him. And if it was crucial for the people to listen to Moses back then, then how much more now?

As Jesus is the greater apostle and leader of God's house. And so there in verse 6, a warning is given to them. It says that they're only God's house or people if they hold firmly to their confidence and hope in which they glory.

That confidence, of course, is Jesus. Now, let's move on to the second section because what happens here is that this warning is spelt out fully to the people.

[7 : 24] For sadly, the people in Moses' time fell short because why? They hardened their hearts and as a result, they aroused God's anger.

Indeed, this is God's own judgment of those events for it's recorded for us in Psalm 95. And this is the psalm that is quoted at length. It would have been familiar, I think, to both the writer of Hebrews as well as his readers.

And he uses it now to explain how it also applies to them. So verse 7 reads as follows. As the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the 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. And I said, Their hearts are always going astray and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest. And therefore, they didn't enter the land, not because Moses was unfaithful, but because the people rebelled against God. They hardened their hearts in unbelief.

[8 : 41] And they did this even though they saw what God had done. Now, as humans, we tend to get angry over a lot of things, don't we? If you're a tidy person, then you get angry with messy people, don't you?

Or, you know, if someone is always on time, people are late or lazy or careless. But if you look here, according to Psalm 95 and Hebrews, what really stokes God's anger are hard hearts.

Hearts which are hardened when they hear God's voice. Or as verse 12 says, sinful, unbelieving hearts that turn away from the living God.

It's much like, you know, what hurts you most is when a loved one turns away, gives you the cold shoulder when you speak to them. That's sort of what is happening here.

Now, this isn't to say that God doesn't get angry with other things like, you know, sexual immorality or violence or greed. But the clear warning from Scripture here is that a hard heart especially

arouses God's anger.

[9 : 52] Because it's a rejection of God himself and ultimately of his character and kindness to us. But unfortunately, that was what the people did.

And they did this knowing who God was and what he had said and done for them. For if you look at verse 16, the way he puts it is that these are not strangers to God.

But they are the very ones that Moses led out of slavery, who saw God's mighty acts firsthand and heard his voice clearly. They are the ones whom God fed in the desert and led each step of the way.

First with a pillar of cloud by there and then by fire at night. And so it says something about the seriousness of their sin, does it not, that God would be angry with them for 40 years.

That's nearly my entire lifetime and more than many of yours. And remember, this is the response from a God who describes himself in Exodus chapter 34.

[10 : 56] And I've got the slide up here. He says of himself that he's a compassionate and gracious God. Slow to anger and abounding in love. Can you begin to sense how aroused God is against this persistent unbelief and rejection of his word?

And so aroused was he in his righteous anger that in verse 18, he swore that he would never enter his rest. God had to declare an oath to himself as though his mere word wasn't enough.

That's the extent of the anger. Put it more bluntly, that was the extent of their unbelief. And it's such a shame really because they were the ones who stood to inherit God's blessings.

God brought them out of Egypt for that very exact purpose. It's like you're planning your next big holiday. I don't know, let's pick a random location like Hawaii, I would say.

You're all paid up. Your spending money has been saved. And every detail of your trip has been meticulously planned. You've gone out, you've bought your gear, you know, your beach gear, the suntan lotion.

[12 : 13] Only for you to then come down the very night before departure with chickenpox. And then you have to cancel. Still go.

Okay, pick another disease then. How heartbreaking is that going to be? Well, this is the same thing with them. The hard part was being freed from slavery, out of Pharaoh's hands.

God had already done that for them. They had even left with gold and silver from their captives. And then right on Canaan's age, the promised land, they get all these wonderful reports from the spies of this land overflowing with milk and honey.

And yet, because they didn't believe in God and rebelled against His word, they die in the desert, right within sight of the promised land. So verse 19 says, They were not able to enter because of their unbelief.

Friends, we face the same danger too, or the same warning, if we harden our hearts against God's voice. Now, God, of course, today speaks by His Son.

[13 : 27] That's what we learn from Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 2. And so, to reject Jesus' offer of salvation is to harden our hearts against God's voice. But actually, if you look at this warning a bit more carefully, who do you think it's actually directed at?

It's actually to people who profess belief in Jesus, isn't it? Not to people who haven't. Can you see there in verses 1 and 12? Who is being addressed there? It's holy brothers and sisters.

We are in the same position as the Israelites were. We too believe and have been freed from slavery, in our case, to sin. And yet, for us, we are yet to enter fully into God's rest.

And so, friends, please consider this question. How trusting are we when we hear God's voice? When we read His Word, are we willing to be changed by it? Are we willing to be challenged out of our comfort zone to admit that how we live and what we believe still falls short of God's truth?

[14 : 35] Do we hunger, therefore, for His Word daily so that we may grow in faith, so that our hearts will not be hardened, so that we will keep depending on Him?

Or is there a hardening of our hearts? You know, that kind of resistance to being challenged by His Word, a resentment even when He does? Or worse, have our minds and hearts been closed off to God's Word already, so that we don't even hear what He says?

It's just all blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, over our heads. Is that what happens when the Word of God is read? Or when we read it? Now, thankfully, I have to say that I've seen many of you, and that is absolutely not true of you.

And it's been so encouraging to see some of you being challenged, not wanting to, but still forgiving others, giving up things which you know draw you away from God because you've heard what God says in His Word.

So, good on you. Keep doing that. But for the rest of us, let us listen carefully to the writer's plea in verse 13. Look there with me.

[15:44] And this is what it says. Encourage one another daily as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Now, these words are here first to urge ourselves personally, and then it says we are to do that with one another.

We are to help one another by encouraging each other daily while it is called today, so that as a church, we are not hardened by sin's deceitfulness, especially the sin of unbelief.

For if this very sin caused the people to forfeit the abundance of the promised land, then how much more do we stand to lose if we fail to enter God's rest?

And so in our third section, we see exactly how glorious this eternal rest is. For we have a promise of a greater rest than they did. And so, let's hear firstly from verse 1 of chapter 4, where it says that the promise of this rest still stands.

So, chapter 4 and verse 1, 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 heard 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.

[17:07] Now we who have believed enter that rest just as God has said, so I declared on oath in my anger. They shall not enter my rest. Embedded in the good news of Jesus' salvation is this promise of rest.

And if we persevere in faith and obedience, then God will fulfill his promise to us. And as we look at the next few verses after that, what we're given are two assurances of why the promise still stands.

The first is tied to the truth that God is still at rest. As we heard from our reading in Genesis tonight and also here in verse 3, God's works has been finished since the creation of the world, that is, on the sixth day, and after which, on the seventh day, God rested from all his works.

And because the promise in Psalm 95 is to enter his rest, can you see? They will not enter my rest. It's not simply just about finding any old rest. It's his rest. This promise can only be offered if God is still at rest himself, which we know he is from Genesis 2.

But secondly, we are assured of this promise rest because of when Psalm 95 was actually written. So try and follow the logic here of the writer. You see, Psalm 95 was written by David.

[18:27] And as it says in verse 7, a long time after the Exodus. So at that time, the people were already in the land. And so, if this promised land was simply about the land, sorry, the promised rest was simply about the land, then it would have been fulfilled in Joshua's day when he conquered and came in and conquered the land of Canaan.

And yet, God speaks through David while he's in the land setting another day, which he's called today. That's the logic that the writer's following.

And so on this day by which he warns his people not to harden their hearts, or they too will not enter his rest. That means God's promise must be more than about the land, which is now confirmed to us in verse 9 where it's spoken of as entering a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

There, those who enter rest from their own work, even as God did. Now, we've of course had clues before now about that because, you know, for example, there's been mention of our heavenly calling in verse 1 of chapter 3.

But this is a beautiful picture that's now being painted of true rest, of true relationship with God and ceasing from our work.

[19:47] I know a lot of you keep asking about your week and you keep talking about how it's been a hard week and, you know, you just don't have time to rest. Well, the picture here is of rest, eternal rest, which is why, as well, we know we haven't entered it because we're all still at work, aren't we?

And so verse 11 says, make every effort to enter that rest so that we do not fall short through disobedience like the wilderness generation did. Now, clearly within this context, the context of the letter, the work the writer talks about here isn't of the toil and the daily grind of labor.

Nor is it about the works that we must do to earn our salvation, not that we can do that. Rather, this work is that of our faith. It's everything that the writer has urged us to do thus far.

So, chapter 1, paying careful attention to Jesus' words and hearing God's voice through him. It's fixing our thoughts on him and trusting in him because he's our pioneer of salvation. And this is work in the sense that it requires discipline, which we encourage one another to do daily as long as it is called today.

[21 : 07] And we haven't entered God's rest as yet. This rest only comes when Christ returns or we're called home before that. Friends, we need to sort of get this promise of rest right, don't we?

because if we don't, we run the risk of not entering. The people of Israel saw this promise, I think, only in terms of the land, of material comfort and prosperity, when what God really promised them was to be their God.

It was a sort of relational rest and for them to be his people. And because they only saw it in terms of the land, that's why they grumbled when life got difficult in the desert. that's why they even wanted to return to the land of slavery in Egypt because they saw that it was too hard to get into the land.

So likewise, what is our vision of rest that we're sort of envisioning that we're going to enter? what is rest to you as you live your life today?

Is it simply to get married and live happily ever after? Or is it to finish your education, get a good job, earn lots so that you can enjoy the illusory fruits of it?

[22 : 27] Or is it to pay off your mortgage, retire in comfort and then live off your sizable share portfolio? Because if ultimately our vision of rest is limited simply to this, then when God speaks a challenging word to us, we run the risk of hardening our hearts because it jeopardizes our vision of rest which is this when what God wants to give us is that, the promise of eternal rest which His word is helping us to get to by trusting in Him.

Friends, God's rest for us is one of eternal glory. It's much, much better than anything we can imagine on this earth. But the only way to enter is to practice the daily discipline of being led by God's word which is my fourth point.

And this word we read in verse 12 and 13 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.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's side. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Friends, I know I used at the start this GPS as an illustration.

But actually, that's not how the word of God works. God's word is not like a road map where, you know, you have this clear path of how you get from here to God's rest where you can see every detail of the route and then all you have to do is follow it.

[24 : 08] Instead, if you look at Psalm 119 and verse 105, God's word is described more like that, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. So yes, the Bible gives us a big picture of salvation history, what God has done in Christ, all the promises that will be fulfilled and so we have a big idea of what God is doing in this world.

But in terms of what it means for each of us day to day and what the actual steps are for us, the Bible doesn't have this individualized plan that's tailored for, you know, Karen or Victor or Natalie or Helen.

Rather, God's word gives us enough, like a lamp, to take that next step. It's like a lamp in the darkness that shows us just that little bit of us, which requires us therefore to submit ourselves to God's word daily, right?

It's designed so that we will trust the Lord each step of the way. That is how God works. That is how God guides us to His rest. So please don't ever resent the way God works because this book that we have in our laps, in our hands, is the living word of God.

It's sharper than the sharpest sword. And we are led by faith when it penetrates into our innermost thoughts, our deepest thoughts and attitudes.

[25 : 36] I always think of it like a sword and it is, but actually it works more like a surgeon's scalpel. It will excise every cancerous sin that still lies in our hearts so that we grow in purity of faith in Jesus.

That's if we don't harden our hearts. That's how it will work. God will purify us as we grow in our faith so that when we get to give an account, what we'll have is Jesus standing by our side or in front of us interceding on our behalf.

On the other hand, if you harden your heart, then the work of God's work, God's word, will catch up with us on that last day. When our sin and our unbelief, it will be revealed just as it says in verse 13. It will be laid bare and we will have to give an account for everything that we've done, every response that we've made to God's word. And then on that day, I'm sorry, but Jesus will not be standing next to you interceding for you.

And then on that day, God will declare on oath, you will never enter my rest. I don't know about you, but that's a thought that I don't even want to entertain.

[26 : 57] But friends, the good news is it is still today. It's not the last day yet. It is still today. And so when you hear God's voice, now, today is the chance for us not to harden our hearts, but to respond by faith in Jesus.

I'm going to just give us a minute now of silence and allow you to just respond to hearing God's word read tonight. And then at the end, I will pray for us.

So please, consider how you will respond to God's word. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the 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. So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall not enter my rest.

Father, with your son Jesus leading the way, help us to enter your rest. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.