

SERMON GUIDE

Hebrews: Entering His Rest

Hebrews 4:1-10



SERMON NOTES

Introduction:

Years ago I ran 26.2 miles in the Music City Marathon. It was a top 3 worst physical experience of my life. I didn't train for the marathon. I figured I could do what I had done in the previous half-marathons I had run: gut it out. I gutted out the first 13.1, but the last half of the run was sheer physical and emotional anguish. I wanted to quit, but I'm not wired that way. So I just entered into this head space of zoning out and living in the pain. When I finished, I didn't know where Katrina was, but I was so physically and emotionally spent that I sat down under a tree and cried. I'm not a crier. I wasn't sad. I was physically and emotionally melted. I went home and spent the next two days resting and recovering. What I needed after that run more than anything was rest.

Over two years ago I preached a sermon on "The Sabbath." It was from Genesis 2 in our Genesis series. I outlined that the principle of Sabbath, of rest, is still something we were created for. We were not made to run with both ends of the candle burning without rest. Work 6, Rest 1 is a healthy pattern we need in order to flourish. It is the creational pattern.

We as humans are chronically restless. We are restless physically and spiritually. One of the themes throughout Scripture is our need for rest. We seek rest. We need rest. But that theme of rest is ultimately connected to our need for the rest that only God can provide. There is a rest, a peace, a contentment, a ceasing from striving that we can have in Christ. But even more so, there is a future rest awaiting us in the New Heavens and New Earth. This rest is not laziness or idleness. It is a deliverance from suffering, testing, and efforts. We will labor and live with the rest of God.

Scripture Exegesis: Hebrews 4:1-10

VS 1 -- 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 a generation of Israelites didn't enter the rest of Canaan because of unbelief. This leads the Hebrew writer in vs 1 to say that the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

Let's look first at the idea of the promise to enter His rest still stands. He is not talking about entering the physical Canaan, but the spiritual one. The generation of wilderness wanderers that grew up under their rebellious parents actually did enter the land of Canaan. So the Hebrew writer isn't talking about that. He's talking about a spiritual reality. A promise of rest that parallels the promise made in the wilderness.

He tells them that they would do well to fear. This isn't a fear of man, but a fear of divine judgment that their fathers in the wilderness experienced that caused them to forfeit the rest. Reaching this land of promise, this place of rest, does not come automatically. They should fear the possibility of missing it if they don't hold fast.

VS 2 – For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

The good news had come to the Israelites in the wilderness just as it has to those who have heard the gospel. But the message didn't benefit them because they did not receive it by faith. They did not appropriate that good news by faith.

What good news came to the Israelites that they didn't hear?

- Exodus 19:3-6
- Exodus 23:20-33

They had good news proclaimed to them, but they didn't receive and internalize it by faith. The Hebrew writer says this so that his listeners and us would be reminded that we too have heard the gospel and the promises of God, but we must believe by faith if we want to enter that rest.

VS 3-7 -- For 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 is, 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.”

We who have believed enter that rest. The promise is ours if we believe. Then he quotes Psalm 95 again. Those who don't believe will not enter His rest.

Then the writer takes an interesting direction. He talks about God's works of creation at the foundation of the world. He finished on the 6th day and rested from His work of creation. God rested on the 7th day. He refers to Genesis. Then he quotes Psalm 95 again and says, "They shall not enter my rest." The rest that God has is the rest we need. But those who do not believe will not enter it.

He says it remains today for some to enter it. There is still an invitation of rest that exists, that those who formerly received the good news but failed because of disobedience didn't enter. In light of that, he appeals to them again not to harden their hearts if they hear His voice, but to repent. If they treat this saving message lightly, and if they "tempt" God by trying to see how far they can presume upon His patience, they could forfeit His rest.

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

These verses get to the heart of what He is driving at.

When the people did eventually reach the land, under the leadership of Joshua, they entered into the "rest" which they had promised. They entered the physical Canaan. They could finally stop wandering.

It had been 40 years in the wilderness. Now they could develop culture, agriculture, trade, occupations, arts, build homes and communities, and all sorts of things they couldn't do as nomads in the wilderness. They had a home. (ILLUSTRATION: have you ever found yourself on vacation or in a season of staying with someone or somewhere not your home? You never feel settled. You feel restless. When you finally get home you can rest. You can settle. That's what the Israelites experienced. Rest.)

But the Hebrew writer says if the true rest they need (and we need) had been provided by Joshua when they entered Canaan, would God have spoken of another day later on? No. You see, Psalm 95 was written far after Joshua took that generation in the land of Canaan. So why would David in Psalm 95 talk about further rest if they had long ago attained the one they had been promised out of Egypt? David in Psalm 95 quotes God's warnings to the Israelites in the wilderness to his own generation. What rest could David's generation be forfeiting because they were in the land already? He was pointing forward to a rest still to come.

What we see here in this passage is a sequence of 3 rests: 1. God's own rest on the seventh day of creation, 2. the rest Joshua gave the people when he brought them into the Promised Land, and 3. the future rest Psalm 95 and Hebrews promises, which remains a promise looking into the future.

The rest reserved for the people of God is called Sabbath rest. It is a participation in God's own rest. Those who enter this rest will cease from their works as God did from His. The work is done. The work is complete. Now there can be rest. This is a picture of the rest we receive in glory. This is why historically people said "Rest in peace" to those who had died. The rest is from their labors, toils, worry, and striving. They can rest in the rest of God.

Application:

1. There is spiritual rest for those in Christ

The Augustine quote is appropriate here. *"You have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."* We will wander and never find contentment in our lives until we have found the rest that is in Christ alone. We must put our hope, confidence, trust, and life in Christ. We surrender all to Him.

This is what Jesus' teaching about dying to ourselves is all about.

If you try to keep your life for yourself, you'll lose it. It's only when you lose your life (on purpose, surrendering to Christ as Lord) that you find it.

Rest for our souls and lives is found in Jesus. In other words, Jesus has lifted the heaviest load of guilt and sin by dying for us. He has also lifted and goes on lifting the daily load of working out our salvation by being the One who works in our lives. He does it by the Spirit within us.

Let me take a moment to say this, because I imagine there are some of you who have been coming here a few weeks or months, maybe newer to Christianity. I want to tell you that there is a lot you can come here and learn. There will be a lifetime of learning if you follow Christ. But it all begins with an acknowledgement that you are a sinner that needs a Savior. It begins with confessing Christ as Lord and laying your life down to Him. Trusting Him alone for your salvation. Call upon Him. Don't wait until you think you know everything. The promise of rest is for those who trust Christ.

2. The rest God offers is not a call to inaction or laziness.

Something that has to be made clear in a passage like this is the value God puts on labor and service. Our work/rest rhythm is 6 and 1. We work 6 and rest 1. This comes from the pattern of God's creative work in creation. But it is important to note that when God "rests" it does not mean inaction. In fact, God continues to work in His creation and people (He just rested from the work of creation).

Jesus says His Father is working. So our rest is not a call to inaction. We don't cease the call we were given to be fruitful and multiply, to take dominion over creation, to cultivate the earth and fill it. Work is good. We are made to work. We are made to have ambition. In fact, most scholars believe we will work in the New Heavens and New Earth. It will not be a punishment or kill our joy. Why? Because we are made to do it. We find fulfillment in productivity. We find satisfaction in work.

Vocation is something I want to preach an entire series on at some point. We need a better theology of work and productivity than exists in Christian's beliefs. Your work is not just to make money. And your work doesn't only find meaning if you give some of it to the church. Work has value in and of itself. In fact, many churches have distorted the understanding of many Christians about work by letting them believe the real work of God is what happens in church ministry (by pastors and staff) and then all the other work people do is spiritually insignificant, but helpful for funding families and ministry. If we're not careful, we become functional gnostics that value what is spiritual in nature and dismiss that which is material in nature.

And I'll end it here for now: I'm not talking about only what you do for a paycheck. It mostly includes that, but many work without earning incomes. Many volunteer at places. Many mothers are homemakers. Others have retired from a vocational job, but work on their home, in their yard/farm. Work is good. Work was given to us before the Fall and it will exist in Heaven. The rest we receive in Christ is not a call to inaction or laziness.

3. We await a future rest.

There is rest now in Christ. In Him, we are invited to have rest and peace in the midst of our toils and labors. But there is a day coming when the toils and labors will give way to eternal rest. This isn't a soul sleep. The rest is for those in the presence of Christ. The laboring on earth under sin and suffering give way to perfect rest.

STORY - Let me tell you personally, what that knowledge of rest will do for your heart. There have been times since Kaleb passed away four years ago, that I will lay in bed at night and think about when he was down the hallway unable to talk. Trapped in his body. Helpless in so many ways. And my heart begins to be gripped all over again with remorse, regrets about not going in there every second, and other things. And the Lord gently leads my mind and heart to the promise of rest. Kaleb is not suffering in this broken world anymore. He has truly entered rest. He is more alive and active than ever before. But in the rest of God.

Richard Sibbes, the English Puritan, wrote his famous work, "*The Saints Everlasting Rest*" about the promise of rest for those in Christ. He said, "Though we have here our labors, our trials, and temptations, yet it is but a little while, and we shall be with Christ in glory."

This is the promised rest we are told in Hebrews we will enter if we endure. It is ours in Christ. It awaits those who continue to look to Him. I'll let Sibbes close us out, "The promise of eternal rest is sure and steadfast, because it is founded upon the oath and covenant of God, who cannot lie."



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you GROW in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you GO to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?



- **REVIEW:**
 - Read **Hebrews 4:1-10** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - Genesis 2:1-3
 - Exodus 20:8-11
 - Mark 2:27
 - Romans 14:5
 - Matthew 16:25
 - Matthew 11:28
 - Jeremiah 6:16
 - John 5:17-18
- **REFLECT:**
 - Why did God rest after creating all things?
 - What is the purpose of rest?
 - What does it mean to "tempt" God?
 - Practically, what are some ways we can honor God's gift of rest?
 - How can rest become something negative?
- **RESPOND:**
 - Do you feel tired? (physically, emotionally, spiritually)
 - How can you implement a theology of vocation in your weekly rhythm?
 - How can you implement a theology of rest in your weekly rhythm?
- **MEDITATE:**

- **Hebrews 4:9-10** – *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest also rested from his works as God did from his.*
- **MEMORIZE:**
 - **1 Peter 2:24** – *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live in righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

LOOK AHEAD



- **FOLLOW:** How will you follow Jesus this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?
- **FISH:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story, your story or the gospel?
- **PRAYER:**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - Shepherding Elder - **Larry Davis**
 - Ministry - **Students**
 - **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
 - **Pray for our mid-term sent ones on the field:**
 - Kaesi
 - Ethan & Dustin (May 16 - June 30)
 - **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on June 15
 - London Team departing June 30
 - Asian Pacific Rim Team #2 departing August 16
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
 - **Pray for the lost.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>